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Siddaramaiah becomes K'taka's longest-serving CM

Siddaramaiah becomes Karnataka's longest-serving CM, completing 7 years 240 days, surpassing Devaraj Urs, celebrating milestone in Mysuru

MYSURU

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday became Karnataka's longest-serving Chief Minister, completing 7 years and 240 days in office, surpassing the 7 years and 239 days served by late Congress leader Devaraj Urs. Marking the milestone in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah signed a commemorative banner to celebrate the achievement.

Siddaramaiah described surpassing Urs's record as "a mere coincidence" and reflected on his long political journey. Both leaders share a connection to Mysuru district and the Congress party. Siddaramaiah currently represents Varuna Assembly, while Urs had won from Hunsur Assembly. Both served two terms as Chief Ministers, with Siddaramaiah holding office from 2013–2018 and 2023 to the present, and Urs serving from 1972–1977 and 1978–1980.

> **The people have given me the opportunity to serve as CM for a longer period. I do not view this as a record, nor should anyone else. I consider it a privilege to serve the people.**
> —Siddaramaiah, K'taka CM

Speaking to the media, Siddaramaiah expressed satisfaction over his service to the people and emphasized his commitment to social justice. He highlighted his political path, from aspiring MLA to serving as Deputy Chief Minister, Leader of Opposition, and finally Chief Minister.

On his future as Chief Minister, he expressed confidence in continuing in the role, subject to party leadership decisions, and reaffirmed his dedication to addressing social inequality and working for the welfare of Karnataka's citizens. He said, "The decision regarding the term must be taken by the senior party leadership. I am confident of completing my tenure as Chief Minister." Regarding queries about surpassing former Chief Minister Devaraj Urs's record, he said "This achievement has happened naturally."

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D K Shivakumar says 'Good luck' for Siddaramaiah

Bengaluru

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Tuesday wished Chief Minister Siddaramaiah "good luck" after the latter expressed confidence about completing a full five-year term in office. Responding to a question on Siddaramaiah's remarks, Shivakumar told reporters, "Let good things happen. I wish him all the best. Good luck."

Union Min Pralhad Joshi mocks Siddaramaiah's rule

Bengaluru

The opposition BJP in Karnataka on Tuesday took a dig at Siddaramaiah for his 'failures.' There was no reason for people to feel happy about Siddaramaiah becoming the longest serving Chief Minister because of "corruption, bickering, financial crisis in the state government and lack of development work", Union Minister Pralhad Joshi told reporters

BJP to launch campaign to spread awareness about G RAM G

BENGALURU

The BJP in Karnataka will soon launch a statewide campaign to spread awareness about the VB-G RAM G, party state president B Y Vijayendra said on Tuesday.

The Shikaripura MLA said the decision was taken because the ruling Congress is spreading disinformation about the VB-G-RAM-G. The Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB—G RAM G) Act was passed by the Parliament recently, replacing the UPA-era rural employment act, MGNREGA.

The Congress has criticised the new act.

"The BJP will launch an awareness campaign about the VB-G RAM G. We have formed a state-level team that includes BJP state general secretary Kudachi Rajeev, MPs Kota Srinivas Pujari, Eeranna Kadadi.There will also be district and Taluk level teams," Vijayendra said in a press conference here.

He said the idea is to make the information about VB-G RAM G reach every village of the state so that there is no confusion among people.

The VB-G RAM G Bill (Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)), introduced in late 2025, replaces MGNREGA to provide 125 days of guaranteed wage work (up from 100) for rural households, enhancing livelihood security with stronger transparency, focus on asset creation, weekly wages, unemployment allowance, and a revised Centre-State funding model

Key Features & Changes from MGNREGA:

- **Enhanced Employment:** Guarantees 125 days of work per household annually (vs. 100), making it the standard entitlement rather than exceptional.
- **Funding Shift:** A centrally sponsored scheme with a 60:40 Centre-State funding ratio for most states (vs. MGNREGA's full central funding for wages).
- **Wage Payments:** Mandates weekly payments or within 15 days of work, with delay compensation.
- **Work Pauses:** Allows states to permit 60 days of pause for crucial sowing/ to ensure labor availability.

2.89 crore voters removed from draft rolls in Uttar Pradesh

LUCKNOW

As many as 2.89 crore voters, who made up 18.70 per cent of the total electorate in Uttar Pradesh, were removed from the draft electoral rolls published on Tuesday after the controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls.

The state has topped the list of voter deletions in the country after the initial phase of SIR.

According to Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Navdeep Rinwa, the remaining 12.55 crore voters out of the total 15.44 crore listed earlier have made it to the draft voter list.

"The draft electoral roll now contains 12.55 crore voters and covers all 75 districts and 403 assembly constituencies of the state," he said at a press conference. The CEC claimed the 2.89 crore voters could not be included in the draft list due to deaths, permanent migration or multiple registrations.

According to the CEO, out of 15,44,30,092 voters in the October 27, 2025 electoral roll, enumeration forms were received for 12,55,56,025 voters, accounting for 81.30 per cent of the electorate.

UP VOTER ENUMERATION STATISTICS

Total Voters: 15,44,30,092

DELETED/REMOVED VOTERS:

Deceased: 46.23 lakh (2.99%)

Permanently Migrated / NA: 2.57 cr (14.06%)

Duplicate Registrations: 25.47 lakh (1.65%)

Giving details about the deleted voters, Rinwa said 46.23 lakh voters (2.99 per cent) were found to be deceased, while 2.57 crore voters (14.06 per cent) had either permanently migrated or were not available during the verification process.

Another 25.47 lakh voters (1.65 per cent) were found to be registered at more than one place.

"The Commission has capped voters per polling station at 1,200 instead of the earlier norm of 1,500. To meet this requirement, around 15,030 new polling stations were created across the state," he said.

Karur Stampede: CBI summons actor Vijay for questioning

CHENNAI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned actor and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) chief Vijay for questioning on January 12 in connection with the Karur stampede case. This follows the Supreme Court's transfer of the investigation to the CBI in October 2025, which had already seen top TVK leaders being questioned. The Karur tragedy occurred on September 27, 2025, during a political rally organized by Vijay at Veluswamypuram. A combination of factors, including poor crowd management and a delayed arrival of the actor, reportedly triggered the stampede, resulting in 41 deaths and numerous injuries. Vijay, who had recently launched his party's campaign ahead of the Assembly elections, faced intense criticism and later met victims' families to apologise.

Originally, the case was investigated by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) appointed by the Madras High Court. The Supreme Court, responding to petitions including one by TVK general secretary Aadhav Arjuna, transferred the probe to the CBI on October 13, 2025, citing the need for a fair and impartial investigation. A three-member committee led by former SC judge Justice Ajay Rastogi, along with two senior IPS officers from outside Tamil Nadu, was set up to monitor the inquiry.

Officials indicated that Vijay's questioning could be a precursor to filing a charge sheet, marking a critical development in the case that continues to draw national attention.

Court grants more time to Sonia Gandhi to respond on electoral roll plea

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted Congress leader Sonia Gandhi additional time to file her response to a plea challenging a magistrate's order that refused to probe allegations related to the inclusion of her name in the electoral rolls before she acquired Indian citizenship in 1983. The court extended the deadline till February 7, the next date of hearing.

The matter came up before Judge Gogne, who had earlier, on December 9, issued notices to Sonia Gandhi and the Delhi Police seeking their replies to the plea. When the case was taken up on Tuesday, Gandhi's counsel sought more time to file a detailed response, which was allowed by the court.

The plea arises from a complaint filed by advocate Vikas Tripathi, vice-president of the Central Delhi Court Bar Association at Rouse Avenue courts. Tripathi had alleged that Gandhi's name was added to the New Delhi constituency's electoral rolls in January 1980, three years before she formally became an Indian citizen in 1983. He had claimed this amounted to forgery and cheating of a public authority. However, the magistrate had dismissed the complaint in a September 11 order, observing that it was legally untenable and lacked substantive material.

Challenging this dismissal, Tripathi moved the present plea, which is now pending consideration. The court will hear the matter next on February 7 after responses from Sonia Gandhi and the police are placed on record.

QUICK READ

1 arrested for 'spying' on Ambala Air Force station

AMBALA

Haryana Police on Tuesday arrested a man for allegedly spying on the Ambala Air Force Station and sharing sensitive information with Pakistan. The accused, Sunil Kumar, a resident of Sabka village in Ambala's Saha area, had reportedly been in contact with a woman on a Pakistani social media platform for the past seven months. Police said he frequently visited the Air Force Station, stayed in touch with a contractor working there, and shared his location, photos and videos through a mobile application. Investigators suspect a honey-trap angle. A local court remanded him to four days of police custody as investigations continue.

Related report on page 6

Grok AI Content: Govt asks X to submit report today

NEW DELHI

The government has given X an additional time till January 7 to submit a detailed Action Taken Report after it issued a stern warning to the Elon Musk-led social media platform over indecent and sexually-explicit content being generated through misuse of AI-based services like 'Grok' and other tools. On Friday, the government directed X to immediately remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated by Grok (X's built-in artificial intelligence interface) or face action under the law. The ministry had also asked the US-based social media firm to submit a detailed action taken report (ATR) within 72 hours of the directive (effectively by January 5).

'Will Trump kidnap our PM?': Chavan's statement kicks up row

NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan has stirred a political row by asking whether US President Donald Trump could "kidnap" Prime Minister Narendra Modi, similar to the alleged seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. The comment came during an interview with IANS while discussing US tariffs on India. Chavan questioned, "Will India witness what happened in Venezuela? Will Trump kidnap our Prime Minister?"

US commandos reportedly seized Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in Venezuela with military support, sparking global attention. He criticized the Indian government for its perceived silence, noting that nations like Russia and China had condemned the US actions. Chavan compared India's response to previous international incidents, including the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, arguing that India has refrained from taking a firm stand due to fear of the US.

The BJP swiftly condemned Chavan's statements. BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari accused him of "shamelessly comparing India to Venezuela" and said the remarks revealed an "anti-India mindset."

POLITICAL MURDER PROBE

Hadi killed due to political vendetta, charge sheet names 17

DHAKA/NEW DELHI

Bangladesh police on Tuesday said student leader Sharif Osman Hadi was killed due to "political vengeance" and filed a charge sheet against 17 people in connection with the murder, alleging the involvement of leaders and activists linked to the now-banned Awami League and its student wing, Chhatra League.

According to investigators, Hadi had emerged as a vocal critic of the Awami League and Chhatra League in the period leading up to his death. Through public rallies and social media posts, he had repeatedly condemned what he described as past violence and intimidation carried out by the two organisations. Police said these statements angered several leaders and activists, ultimately leading to a conspiracy to eliminate him.

Md Shafiqul Islam, Additional Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch, said the killing was carried out with clear political intent. He stated that the charge sheet detailed the roles of 17 accused persons, including planners, facilitators and those directly involved in the attack.

The alleged shooter, Faisal Karim Masud, was directly associated with the Chhatra League, the student wing of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party, police said. Investigators claimed Masud acted on instructions from senior figures and received logistical support before and after the attack.

Police added that call records, digital evidence and witness statements had been collected to substantiate the charges. Several of the accused are currently in custody, while efforts are underway to arrest others who remain absconding.

QUICK READ

KIMS Koppal announces walk-in admission on Jan 9

Koppal

KIMS Koppal will conduct walk-in admissions on January 9 to fill remaining government seats in Allied Health Science courses for the 2025-26 academic year. Students who meet eligibility criteria must register with the Principal of the Allied Science Department by 4 pm on the same day, bringing all required documents. Details of available courses and the seat matrix are available on the KIMS website. The institute will release the final merit list of admitted students at 6 pm on January 9. This provides a last opportunity for students to secure government seats at KIMS.

Preliminary meeting scheduled ahead of Mahaniyar Jayanti

Koppal

A preliminary meeting will be held on January 8 at 11 am in the District Collector's Office Hall to plan celebrations for Mahayogi Veman Jayanti on January 19 and Ambigara Chowdayya Jayanti on January 21. The session will be chaired by District Collector Dr. Suresh B. Itnal. Officials from relevant departments and community leaders are required to attend, the Assistant Director of the Kannada and Culture Department stated. The meeting aims to coordinate preparations and ensure smooth conduct of the upcoming cultural events, reflecting the district's commitment to honoring local traditions and community participation.

Banks must serve people with human values: Bommai

Bommai proposed large loan fairs for farmers, women, youth, and traders, emphasizing simple processes and prioritizing housing loans

GADAG

Banks are not just financial institutions; they play a key role in guiding the economy and supporting society, said MP Basavaraj Bommai during a district-level banks advisory committee meeting held at Gadag's Zilla Panchayat hall on Tuesday.

He emphasized that the money in banks belongs to the public and should be used to reduce regional imbalances by supporting local development. "Banks should work with humanity, social responsibility, and pro-people thinking. Profit should not be the only goal," he added.

The meeting reviewed loan disbursement, financial inclusion, and progress in implementing government schemes. MP Bommai highlighted that banks must ensure that benefits of programs like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Mudra Loan, SWANIDHI Yojana, Kisan Credit Card, and self-help group loans reach all eligible citizens.

He suggested organizing large-scale loan fairs to make loans easily accessible for farmers, women, young entrepreneurs, and small traders. The process should be simple, and no eligible person should face unnecessary delays. Housing loans, he said, are vital for improving living standards and reducing poverty, and banks should prioritize them.

Lead Bank Manager Santosh M.V. reported that 183 branches operate in the district, with a loan-deposit ratio of 102.18% as of September 2025. A total of Rs 278,562.77 lakh was disbursed to priority sectors, including agriculture, across all talukas.

The meeting also reviewed progress on state and central schemes like Ujjaini, Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation, Devaraj Urs Backward Classes Development Corporation, PMAY, and PMFBY.

Deputy Commissioner C.N. Sridhar, District Superintendent of Police Rohan Jagadish, NABARD AGM Mayura Kamble, RBI AGM Suraj S, SBI Regional Manager Nagasubbareddy, and other officials attended.

MP Bommai instructed banks to increase public contact in rural areas, provide clear reasons for loan rejections, coordinate with district administration, and continuously report progress. He warned that unsatisfactory performance would result in notices to concerned banks.

Shirsi launches Gram One Centre for public

Village President Lakshmi Shettar, Vice President Usha Shetty, member Radha Naveen Shetty, officials, and locals attended, with Nayak urging full utilization of Gram One Kendra services

SHIRSI

A new Gram One Kendra has been inaugurated in Isalur, Shirsi, aiming to bring government services closer to rural residents, officials said on Tuesday. The initiative is intended to reduce the need for villagers to travel to offices or urban areas for essential services.

MLA Bheemanna Naik, who inaugurated the centre, said the Gram One Kendras provide hundreds of services from various government departments under one roof. Residents can now obtain passports, caste certificates, income certificates, and other official documents without leaving their villages. The centre also supplies medicines to people from ten nearby villages in Suttamuttal, helping save both time and travel costs.

Village President Lakshmi Shettar, Vice President Usha Shetty, member Radha Naveen Shetty, along with officials and other locals, were present at the event. Nayak urged the public to make full use of the services offered at the Gram One Kendra.

The government highlighted that these centres aim to improve access to information and benefits, empowering rural communities while ensuring convenience and efficiency. Villagers can now access essential services without depending on distant offices, fostering greater inclusivity in government programs.

By centralising services in local areas, the Gram One Kendra in Isalur is expected to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and provide timely assistance to the rural population.

The launch marks a step forward in making government support more accessible and responsive to citizens' needs.

Stop child marriage: Apply to lead change

GADAG

The District Child Protection Unit has invited applications to select a "zero tolerance" gram panchayat for child marriage under the 2024-2025 Karnataka innovative project. One panchayat from the district will be chosen to lead efforts in making the area free from child marriage. Interested candidates must submit applications by January 23, 2026. The District Child Protection Officers stated that applicants can obtain further details by visiting the District Child Protection Unit office. The initiative aims to strengthen community awareness and promote child rights, supporting Karnataka's goal to eliminate child marriage through active local participation.

Shri Shekar Gowda stressed legal registration for child care institutions, protection under law, advisory support, helpline 1098, and basic facilities

Gadag district holds training on Child Protection Acts

GADAG

A training program on "Child Protection Acts" was organized for officers and staff of child care institutions in Gadag. The program was hosted by the District Child Protection Unit in collaboration with the Directorate of Child Protection, Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Bengaluru.

Shekar Gowda Ramatnal, member of the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, emphasized the importance of legal registration for child care institutions. "Institutions must be registered under the law. Unregistered grants leave children unprotected, and no department is responsible for their safety. Every child should be protected under the law, and a family-like atmosphere must be created," he said. He also highlighted the importance of advisory lists, child helpline 1098, and providing basic facilities in care institutions.

Geeta Sindha, Additional District Magistrate, Gadag, said, "Earlier, children played freely with guidance from elders. Today, they face many challenges. Legal protection is necessary to safeguard their innocence and well-being."

M. Gangappa, Sub-Divisional Officer and Magistrate, stressed that awareness and training programs should focus on child rights and laws such as the Child Marriage Prohibition Act and Child Labour Prohibition Act. "Staff must be trained to ensure these laws are understood and followed," he said.

Jayadevi Kavalur, President of the Child Welfare Committee, Gadag, highlighted the responsibility of parents and caregivers in ensuring children's holistic growth and understanding child protection laws.

Resource person Harish Jogi, UNICEF Coordinator, Koppal, conducted sessions for staff from Child Helpline, Adoption Centers, and Government Children's Homes, helping them understand policies and procedures for protecting children effectively.

The program was attended by dignitaries including members of the Juvenile Justice Board, District Investigation Committee, and officials from all child care institutions in Gadag. Participants said the program enhanced their knowledge and commitment to safeguarding children's rights across the district.

Stray dog sterilization center shuts down

HAVERI

The newly opened stray dog sterilization surgery center at the APMC yard on Gutala Road in Haveri city was closed the very same day it started, leaving residents frustrated. The center, opened on December 20, aimed to provide neutering treatment to thousands of stray dogs in the city through a partnership between the Haveri Municipal Corporation and the Animal Husbandry Department.

On its opening day, veterinarians operated on 25 stray dogs. However, the center has not resumed work even after 15 days, forcing residents to continue dealing with aggressive stray dogs daily. Many locals have expressed concern over safety, as some have fallen or been hurt while trying to avoid stray dogs on streets.

The district administration had earlier launched a larger program to manage stray dog numbers across Haveri, following a Supreme Court directive. Ten neutering surgery centers were set up across the district, including taluk centers in Byadagi, Hanagal, and Ranebennur. Each taluk center managed to sterilize around 50 dogs, while the district center handled only 25 before closing.

Haveri Municipal Council Commissioner Kantaraju said, "We have allocated facilities at the old APMC market to sterilize dogs and provide food. We sterilized 25 dogs initially and are calling for tenders to continue the program. Around 1,500 stray dogs will be neutered, with food provided and some dogs released back safely."

Vibhuti Shetty, district president of the Nomad Association, highlighted the dangers posed by stray dogs in town. "Dogs attack the public and cause accidents. While no one was bitten this time, some people have fallen and been injured. Authorities must continue neutering seriously rather than stopping midway," she said.

Residents hope the program resumes quickly to control the stray dog menace and ensure the safety of people and pets in Haveri.

Citizens urge completion, renaming of Gadag flyover

GADAG

Residents of Gadag have urged MP Basavaraj Bommai to complete the long-delayed railway flyover and name it after two respected figures of Karnataka, B.G. Annigeri Guru and His Holiness Sri L. Siddaganga Shivakumara Swamiji. The flyover at the manned railway gate number 32 on Hombal Road via Gangapur Peta has been under construction for nearly eight years, causing daily problems for commuters and local residents. Krishna H. Hadapada, President of the Hombalanaka Janata Colony Development Service Association, submitted a petition to the MP, requesting that the work be finished as soon as possible and that the flyover be named in honor of the two leaders.

B.G. Annigeri Guru, born in Annigeri Taluk of Gadag district, dedicated his life to education and social justice. His Holiness Sri L. Siddaganga Shivakumara Swamiji was a widely respected religious and social guru who contributed to education and community service in Karnataka. The petition suggested naming the flyover on Gangimadi Road at Savita Maharshi Circle after B.G. Annigeri Guru, and the flyover in Amegate along the Gangapur Peta route after Sri Siddaganga Swamiji.

The petition was submitted by a delegation including Krishna H. Hadapada, working president Parashuram Annigeri, and other leaders of the association. Senior leaders of Gadag District Savita Samaj, youth leader Vinayak Raichur, and community representatives supported the move.

Key points highlighted in the petition include the need to speed up construction, ensure public safety, and honor the contributions of these two prominent figures by naming the flyovers after them. The association appealed to the MP to address these long-standing concerns and complete the project in the public interest.

Residents hope that with political support, the flyover construction will be completed soon, easing traffic issues and paying tribute to leaders who have greatly impacted society.

Koppal prison inmates donate meals for Jatre

KOPPAL

In a touching gesture of kindness, undertrial prisoners at the Koppal District Prison skipped one meal to donate food grains for the Mahadasoha, the community feast held during the annual Gavimath Jatre.

The Gavimath Jatre is one of North Karnataka's biggest religious festivals and attracts lakhs of devotees every year. A major attraction of the festival is the Mahadasoha, where free meals are served to people without any discrimination. Usually, farmers, labourers, traders, and donors contribute grains, vegetables, money, and firewood for this purpose.

This year, the festival witnessed a rare and emotional contribution. On January 2, all 135 undertrial inmates in the Koppal District Prison unanimously decided to give up their morning breakfast. The food grains saved from the skipped meal were collected and later donated to the Mahadasoha organisers. In total, the inmates contributed 30 kilograms of wheat flour and 50 kilograms of rice, which were formally handed over on January 4.

Prison officials said the decision came entirely from the inmates. In-charge Superintendent of the District Prison, Ambarish S. Pujar, said the prison administration only gave permission after the prisoners insisted. He added that the intention behind the act mattered more than the quantity donated.

The inmates were reportedly inspired by Abhinava Gavisiddeshwara Swamiji of Gavimath, who visited the prison in October 2025 under the Parivartane programme.

LONG TENURE CELEBRATION

Fans celebrate as Siddaramaiah matches Urs record

DAVANAGERE

Supporters of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah celebrated across Karnataka after he equalled the record of former CM D. Devaraj Urs for longest time in office. Events were held in Shivamogga, Mysuru, Davanagere, and several other towns, marked by food sharing, prayers, and slogan shouting.

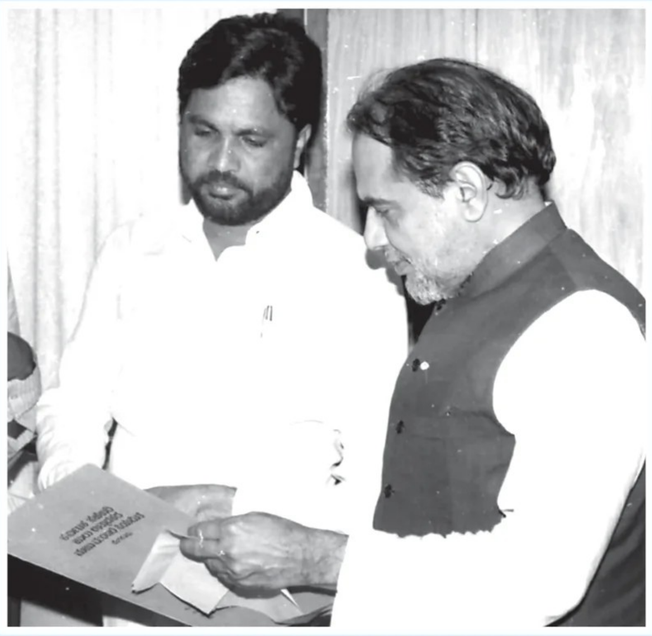
In Shivamogga, fans gathered near a private bus stand and put up a 30-foot cutout of Siddaramaiah. They offered flowers, raised slogans, and cooked naatikoli chicken biryani together. The biryani was packed and distributed to the public, drawing large crowds. Organisers said more than a thousand food boxes were shared during the celebration.

Congress leader M. Srikanth said the event reflected the happiness of supporters as Siddaramaiah matched the tenure record set by Devaraj Urs. He said people came together in a joyful mood to mark what they see as a historic moment.

Similar scenes were seen in Mysuru, the Chief Minister's hometown. Activists gathered near his residence in Varuna constituency and distributed sweets. They raised slogans wishing him a long term in office. Siddaramaiah met the supporters briefly, accepted a petition, and acknowledged their greetings.

In Davanagere, supporters offered special prayers at the Biralingeshwara temple on PB Road. They burst crackers, displayed photos of Devaraj Urs and Siddaramaiah, and shared sweets with passersby. Fans described the Chief Minister as a leader close to the poor and committed to non-violence.

Some supporters also issued strong political messages, urging party leaders to ensure stability of the government and allow Siddaramaiah to complete a full term. Police and local officials kept watch as celebrations concluded peacefully across the cities. Leaders said such public celebrations showed emotional attachment, but appealed for calm, unity, and respect for democratic processes, noting that achievements should be marked responsibly while focusing on governance, welfare delivery, and continued development across regions, communities, and future generations with shared optimism statewide today.



Siddaramaiah's political career is marked by a journey from the Janata Parivar to the Indian National Congress, culminating in two terms as Chief Minister and the distinction of becoming Karnataka's longest-serving Chief Minister.

EARLY CAREER AND RISE

- **1983:** Began his electoral career by winning the Chamundeshwari Assembly seat on a Lok Dal ticket.
- **1985:** Re-elected and served as the Minister for Veterinary Services and Animal Husbandry in the Janata Party government.
- **1994:** Became the Finance Minister and later the Deputy Chief Minister in the Janata Dal government. He holds the record for presenting the state budget 13 times as Finance Minister.
- **2004-2005:** Served as Deputy Chief Minister again in the Congress-JD(S) coalition government.
- **2005:** Expelled from the JD(S) due to differences with party founder H.D. Deve Gowda, a move that led him to join the Indian National Congress in 2006.

Joining Congress and Becoming CM

- **2006:** Joined the Congress party and won the subsequent by-election from Chamundeshwari.
- **2008:** Elected to Varuna constituency and became the Leader of the Opposition, a position he held again from 2019 to 2023.
- **2013-2018:** Led the Congress to an absolute majority and served his first full five-year term as Chief Minister, the first in the state in 40 years. His tenure was noted for populist "Bhagya" welfare schemes and his focus on social justice for the backward classes, Dalits, and minorities (AHINDA coalition).
- **2018:** Lost the Chamundeshwari seat but won from Badami constituency.
- **2023:** Returned as Chief Minister in May 2023 after the Congress party's victory in the assembly elections.
- **2026 (Current):** As of January 6, 2026, he has surpassed the record of Devaraj Urs to become the longest-serving Chief Minister of Karnataka by total accumulated days in office.

HISTORIC TRIUMPH IN KARNATAKA: SIDDARAMAIAH SHATTERS 45-YEAR-OLD RECORD!

From Grassroots to Glory — A Son of the Soil Becomes the Longest-Serving CM in Karnataka's History!

On January 6, 2026, history was rewritten in the political annals of Karnataka. With a cumulative tenure that eclipsed one of the most enduring legacies in the state's political history, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah emerged victorious in a race not against an opponent, but against time itself. In achieving a total of 2,792 days in office, the veteran leader surpassed the legendary D. Devaraj Urs—the towering social justice icon whose record stood unchallenged for nearly 45 years—and etched his name indelibly into the history books.

Setting the Scene: The Urs Benchmark

To appreciate the magnitude of Siddaramaiah's achievement, one must first honour the benchmark he broke. D. Devaraj Urs, a charismatic reformer and advocate for the marginalized, served two impactful terms as Karnataka's Chief Minister (1972-77, 1978-80), totaling 2,792 days at the helm. Urs revolutionised Karnataka politics through bold reforms such as the Land Reforms Act of 1974, the establishment of the Backward Classes Commission, and the historic renaming of the state from Mysore to Karnataka. His tenure profoundly reshaped the socio-political landscape, empowering communities long kept on the margins.

For decades, Urs' record stood as a symbol of both political longevity and transformational leadership—until Siddaramaiah's perseverance met destiny.Siddaramaiah's Long March: From Humble Beginnings to Political Titan Born into a modest family, Siddaramaiah's political journey wasn't scripted for royalty or grandeur—it was a tale of grit, resilience and grassroots empowerment. Early in his life, Siddaramaiah never envisioned himself as more than a Member of the Legislative Assembly, let alone the state's Chief Minister. Yet this unlikely protagonist steadily climbed the political ladder—contest after contest, victory after setback—learning, adapting, and always remaining anchored to the people's pulse. Over more than four decades in politics, he has faced internal party battles, power struggles, shifting alliances, and even periods of opposition. His story is one of perseverance in the truest sense.

The Moment of Triumph

As the calendar flipped to January 6, 2026, the jubilant announcement from the Chief Minister's office reverberated across Karnataka:

"Today I have equalled the tenure of the great D. Devaraj Urs…

Tomorrow, I will break it — not for myself, but for the people who entrusted me with their dreams."

Supporters celebrated not with dry speeches, but with color, culture, and custom—including plans for a Nati Koli Oota (traditional country chicken feast) in Bengaluru and Mysuru, a tribute to Siddaramaiah's fondness for local flavors and the roots of Karnataka's rich culinary heritage.

In local communities from Mysuru to Mangaluru, from Hubballi-Dharwad to rural taluks, banners went up bearing slogans of gratitude and pride as people hailed this milestone as their own achievement.

More Than Just Numbers: The Substance Behind the Record

Siddaramaiah's record is not merely about days served — it reflects policy continuity and an agenda rooted in social justice:

Championing the Marginalised

Following the Ahinda philosophy (minorities, backward classes, and Dalits) pioneered by Devaraj Urs, Siddaramaiah has sought to ensure that governance empowers every part of society.

A Tale of Two Tenures

Siddaramaiah's stewardship of Karnataka has come in two distinct terms

First Term:
May 13, 2013 – May 15, 2018

In his first tenure, Siddaramaiah made history by becoming the first Chief Minister in decades to complete a full five-year term—an accomplishment rare in a state known for coalition politics and frequent leadership turnover. This period established him as a leader capable of stability and sustained governance.

Second Term:
May 20, 2023 – Present

After a brief interlude, Siddaramaiah returned to Lal Bahadur Shastri (Vidhana Soudha) as Chief Minister in 2023. From this term alone, he added 963+ days to his tenure—bringing his cumulative total to 2,792 days by Jan 6, 2026, thus equalling Urs' storied record before surpassing it.

Common Man's Schemes

Under his leadership, guarantee schemes reached millions, free bus rides under the Shakti initiative saw unprecedented uptake, and direct benefit transfers totalling thousands of crores reached the most vulnerable households—an echo of the welfare state vision Urs once championed.

Stable Governance in a Fragmented Era

In an era where coalition politics often stymies governance, Siddaramaiah's ability to maintain continuity—completing full terms and now setting a new record—is a testament to political acumen and broad popular support.

Legacy and Future: A New Benchmark for Karnataka Politics

By surpassing a record that had stood unchallenged since the late 1970s, Siddaramaiah has not only cemented his name in the history of Karnataka but also raised the bar for future leaders. His achievement is a beacon for aspiring public servants, illustrating that authenticity, connection with the grassroots, and an unwavering belief in people's power can defy odds that once seemed insurmountable.

As political commentators reflect, "Records are meant to be broken, and in the process, new legacies are forged." Siddaramaiah himself has said this milestone is not an endpoint, but a moment of reflection — of where Karnataka has come from, and where it aspires to go."

A Celebration of Democracy, Resilience, and Service

When Siddaramaiah took office as Chief Minister for the second time in 2023, few would have predicted this crescendo. Yet here we stand — on January 6, 2026 — with the longest-serving Chief Minister in Karnataka's history, a leader whose journey resonates with resilience, relentless effort, and an unshakeable bond with the people.

In breaking Devaraj Urs' forest-high record of 45 years, Siddaramaiah has not just rewritten numbers — he has reaffirmed faith in Karnataka's democratic spirit, proving once again that service, humility, and perseverance can achieve the extraordinary.

A life of struggle

Even after beginning to practice law, I did not completely dedicate myself in the courts. My mind was always concerned about the hardships of the exploited classes and that was when I came under the influence of socialist thinker Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. As a student, I lived a tough life in a rented room in Mysore. The hardships of those times gave me a deep perspective and have now helped in formulating several schemes for the welfare of the poor and downtrodden. 'I know what trials and tribulations the poor face. I have myself experienced those difficulties. That is why I introduced schemes like Anna Bhagya (providing food grains to the poor for free or at subsidized prices), Ksheera Bhagya (providing milk) and Vidyasiri (providing assistance for education)'.

—Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Design: Mahesh Kini

QUICK READ

Villagers give grand farewell to retired teacher

Dharwad

Villagers of Chikkamalligewad celebrated the retirement of teacher Chandra Dodamani, who served the same village school for thirty years. On her last day, a festive procession was held through the village streets, with flowers showered on the teacher by students and villagers alike. Former students and colleagues joined the farewell ceremony, paying tribute to her dedication and guidance. Chandra Dodamani expressed heartfelt gratitude for the warm send-off and the participation of alumni and transferred teachers. Villagers also organized a felicitation program, wreath-laying, and a community meal, turning the occasion into a joyful festival honoring her lifelong service to education.

Bike rider dies in Davanagere highway accident

Davanagere

A 27-year-old bike rider, Manjunath from Shingli village in Gadag, died in a road accident on National Highway 48 near Shiramgondanahalli Road while traveling to Bengaluru. Authorities suspect he was hit from behind by an unknown vehicle. Manjunath died on the spot due to the collision. Traffic officials, including Traffic CPI Manjunath and South Traffic Police, visited the scene and launched an investigation. The incident has raised safety concerns for commuters on the highway, and authorities are urging motorists to drive cautiously and follow traffic rules to prevent such tragic accidents.

DCM Shivakumar visits Ballari riot victim's family

Former minister Sriramulu questioned investigation, suggested possible cover-up, said scuffle led to fatal bullet, demanded probe and justice

BALLARI

Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar visited the home of Congress worker Rajashekar on Tuesday, who was shot dead during the Ballari violence over a banner dispute, and expressed condolences to his family. Housing and Minority Welfare Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan, the district in-charge minister, accompanied him.

Shivakumar left Bengaluru in the morning and reached Rajashekar's house in the afternoon. Speaking to the media, he said, "A Congress worker tragically lost his life in the riots yesterday. I visited his family to share their grief and offer support. The party stands with them. The family has requested a government job, which we will try to provide within legal procedures."

The incident occurred during clashes that erupted following tensions over the erection of a banner. Several people were reportedly involved in scuffles, and authorities said both sides contributed to the violence. Arrests have been made from both parties. Shivakumar emphasized that justice would be served, and investigations are ongoing.

Former minister Sriramulu, speaking on the issue, raised concerns about the investigation and hinted at possible attempts to cover up details. "The root cause of the case is unclear. Both parties were involved, and the bullet that killed Rajashekar was fired in the heat of the scuffle. Proper investigation is needed, and I will wait to see that justice is delivered to the family," he said.

Shivakumar's visit brought a sense of relief to the grieving family, showing the government's support. Authorities have assured that the case will be handled according to the law and that efforts will be made to provide the family with aid, including employment assistance.

The Ballari violence has sparked widespread concern over law and order, with officials continuing to monitor the situation closely and ensure peace in the district. Court and police investigations are ongoing to identify the responsible parties.

Siddaramaiah will present Karnataka's next budget: Jarkiholi

CHIKKODI

Minister Satish Jarkiholi said that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will present the next Karnataka budget and is expected to complete his full five-year term in office. Speaking to the media in Hukkeri town, he added that Siddaramaiah has already served two and a half years and remains confident about finishing his tenure.

"Karnataka is fortunate to have a leader like Siddaramaiah. After the long tenure of Devaraj Urs, Siddaramaiah has continued to serve with dedication. This is a proud moment for the Congress party and for all of us," Jarkiholi said. He congratulated the Chief Minister for his hard work in bringing the Congress party to power and maintaining political stability in the state.

On questions about a possible change in leadership, former minister K.N. Rajanna said that the matter will be discussed when necessary. "At present, there is no plan to replace the Chief Minister. He will continue," Rajanna said. He also addressed ongoing investigations into incidents such as the Bellary riots and attacks on DCC Bank and Karenna, confirming that the police are handling the cases and the truth will emerge through proper procedures.

Responding to claims from political opponents about the next elections, Rajanna said, "Everyone will aim to win, but it is too early to predict. Let's talk about elections in 2028."

Former minister K.N. Rajanna said no leadership change planned, Chief Minister continues, and investigations into Bellary riots, DCC Bank and Karenna attacks will reveal truth

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar expressed support for Siddaramaiah, wishing him health, success, and opportunities to serve the people. He noted that there is no confusion within the party and emphasized unity in governance.

Siddaramaiah himself has acknowledged that the record-breaking tenure is due to public support. He thanked citizens for their blessings, saying his achievements are the result of their trust, not personal ambition.

The announcement reassures Congress supporters that Siddaramaiah will continue leading the state and overseeing major policy decisions, including the upcoming budget presentation.

Mirchi Bajji served to lakhs at Koppal fair

KOPPAL

Thousands of devotees at the Abhinava Gavi Mutt Fair in Koppal, known as the "Kumbh Mela of South India," were served mirchi bajji as Prasad on Tuesday. Around 5–6 lakh people enjoyed the spicy snack as part of the Dasoha, a community meal. The initiative, run voluntarily by the Samana Manaskar group for 11 years, used huge quantities of ingredients and involved volunteers from over 25 villages. Starting preparations five days earlier, organizers spent their own funds to serve devotees free of charge. The fair continues daily, blending devotion, food, and community spirit for visitors from across Karnataka.

Shettar accused the state of delaying land acquisition, neglecting Belgaum–Dharwad rail project, questioning CM's morality amid stalled development

Shettar criticizes Siddaramaiah over governance issues

HUBBALLI

Former Chief Minister and MP Jagadish Shettar criticized the current Siddaramaiah government, saying governance in the state has weakened and public welfare projects are facing delays.

Speaking to the media, Shettar said records like serving consecutive terms are not important. "What matters is pro-people governance," he added. According to him, administrative systems have collapsed, law and order have deteriorated, and economic activities are suffering due to pending contractor bills and lack of funding for public projects. Shettar also pointed out that the state government has delayed land acquisition for central projects and neglected the Belgaum–Dharwad railway initiative. "What morality does the CM have to claim achievements while basic development suffers?" he questioned.

He referred to incidents such as unruly behavior by MLAs in Bellary and stone-pelting in Bangalore, saying these reflect declining law and order. On MLA and MLC interactions in Bidar, he stressed responsible behavior is essential among elected representatives. Shettar highlighted delays in North Karnataka development, including the Savadatti Yellamma temple project, where central grants were pending due to state inaction. He urged that all development work start immediately, praising contributions from devotees while criticizing state negligence.

He concluded by emphasizing that effective governance, timely funding, and law and order are crucial for the state's growth and public welfare.

Minister's son's driver stabbed in Belagavi

BELAGAVI

A shocking incident occurred on Club Road this afternoon when Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar's son Mrinal's car driver, Basavanth Kadolkar (32), was stabbed multiple times by unidentified assailants. Basavanth, a resident of Belagudi village in Belagavi taluk, was standing near the parked car when two men on a bike suddenly attacked him.

He was stabbed in four places, including his chest, shoulder, and thigh, before the attackers fled. Basavanth was rushed to a private hospital in Belagavi for treatment. Mrinal Hebbalkar immediately arrived at the hospital following the attack. DCP Narayan Baramani visited the hospital and began collecting information about the incident.

The incident falls under the jurisdiction of Camp Police Station, and authorities have laid traps to capture the accused. Preliminary reports suggest the attack may be linked to a financial transaction, though the exact reason is still under investigation.

In a similar case in Shivamogga last month, Syed Barkat, a mobile shop mechanic, was stabbed by two assailants due to an old enmity. He survived and is recovering in hospital. Police are continuing investigations into both incidents, urging the public to remain cautious while they track the perpetrators.

Authorities have assured that strict measures are being taken to prevent such attacks in the city and ensure public safety.

Annie Geri residents urged to maintain cleanliness

ANNIGERI

Vice President of the State Decentralization Planning and Development Committee, D.R. Patil, emphasized the importance of public cooperation in keeping the town clean. Speaking during a recent cleanliness campaign at Suttamuttal, he said, "If we protect the environment with cleanliness, our health will improve as well. Everyone should maintain cleanliness around their homes for the well-being of the community."

Patil suggested that instead of carrying out cleaning activities in individual wards every Monday, local administration members should organize a coordinated drive in all 23 wards simultaneously on the first Monday of each month. He highlighted that such collective efforts would make the campaigns more effective and visible.

During the event, Patil congratulated senior citizens and residents who actively participated in the cleanliness drive and welcomed their suggestions for improvement. He praised the commitment of the community in supporting sustainable hygiene practices.

The program was attended by Tehsildar Manju Nath Da Sappa, Village Head Y.G. Gaddigowda, Village President, Vice President, and other officials. They discussed ways to maintain cleanliness and encouraged citizens to actively contribute.

Patil concluded by urging all residents to take personal responsibility for hygiene, saying that clean surroundings not only improve health but also enhance the beauty and livability of Annigeri.

One arrested in Hosapete woman murder case

HOSAPETE

Police in Hosapete arrested a man on Tuesday in connection with the murder of a married woman near the city railway station, officials said. The accused, Khaja Hussain M. Bata, was taken into custody following preliminary investigation into the case, police confirmed.

The incident occurred in the early hours of Tuesday in the Chapalgadda area close to the railway station, prompting swift police action. According to police, a personal dispute between the accused and the woman is suspected to have led to the crime, and further investigation is underway.

A case has been registered at Chittawadgi Police Station based on a complaint filed by the victim's mother, officials said. Police said the woman, identified as Uma, had been living in Hosapete and was working to support her family. She was the mother of three children and had been separated from her husband for several years, sources said.

Senior police officers, including the Superintendent of Police and other officials, visited the scene and reviewed the situation. Authorities said the accused was arrested soon after the incident and will be produced before a court. Police urged the public to cooperate with the investigation and assured that strict action will be taken as per law. Further details will emerge as the probe continues.

Dharwad leads in guarantee scheme implementation: Revanna

DHARWAD

Dharwad district has emerged as the state leader in implementing government guarantee schemes, officials said during a district-level workshop and festival held at Annaji Rao Shiroor Ranga Mandir. The event was organised by the district administration in collaboration with the Zilla Panchayat and the District Implementation Authority of Guarantee Schemes.

H.M. Revanna, Chairman of the State Guarantee Scheme Implementation Authority, inaugurated the function and stressed that even the most marginalized citizens should benefit from these schemes. "Dharwad has achieved 98 percent disbursement of guarantee scheme funds to beneficiaries, placing it first in the entire state," he noted.

Personnel Minister Santosh Lad highlighted that Rs 60 lakh crore per year is being allocated to the five-year guarantee schemes, amounting to Rs 3 lakh crore over five years. Special attention is being given to women through the Grihalakshmi Fund, recognising their contributions and welfare.

The programme was attended by Governor N.H. Konardi, Belgaum Division Deputy Chairman S.R. Patil, Dharwad District Guarantee Scheme Implementation Authority Chairman S.R. Patil, Hubballi Electricity Supply Company Limited Chairman Syed Ajjam Peer S. Khadri, Vidya Parishad member F.H. Jakkappan, District Officer Divya Prabhu, District Panchayat CEO Bhuvanesh Patil, and other officials.

The workshop aimed to review the progress of all five state guarantee schemes, ensure transparency, and promote awareness among beneficiaries. Officials said continuous monitoring and outreach programs have helped Dharwad achieve top rankings statewide, setting an example for other districts to follow.

Revanna urged authorities to maintain momentum and expand coverage, ensuring that every eligible citizen receives timely benefits under the state's social security and welfare initiatives.

ASHA workers trained to boost brain health

GADAG

A training workshop for ASHA workers on brain health initiatives was held at the Taluk Health Officers' Hall here, aiming to strengthen early detection and care of neurological disorders.

The program was inaugurated by District Surgeon Dr. B. C. Karigowda, who stressed the importance of identifying any neurological symptoms early. He urged workers to refer patients promptly to the Brain Health Center at the District Hospital, where specialists provide treatment and guidance.

The workshop was organized under the joint support of the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat Gadag, District Health and Family Welfare Department, and KH Patil Institute of Medical Sciences, Gadag. Dr. Karigowda marked the occasion by watering a sapling, symbolizing growth and awareness.

Resource persons included Dr. Ashwini Kuri, a physiotherapist at the Brain Health Center, Ravi Nandihal, and District Program Coordinator Praveen Ronada, who conducted practical training sessions.

Taluk Health Officer Dr. Preet Khona presided over the program, encouraging ASHA workers to actively participate in the Karnataka Brain Health Program. Taluk Health Education Officer Dr. Rajenda S. Gadada introduced the initiative, while ASHA worker Sahana Joshi Vijayalakshmi performed a prayer song.

DHARWAD SECURITY SCARE

Bomb threat forces Dharwad High Court evacuation

DHARWAD

An email threat warning of a bomb in Dharwad High Court created panic, prompting authorities to evacuate judges, lawyers, staff, and clients. The message was received by the office of the Additional General, triggering immediate security measures.

District Superintendent of Police Gunjan Arya led the response, with the bomb disposal squad conducting a thorough inspection of the court premises. "We received the threat via email and acted immediately. The High Court already has strong security, but all necessary teams have arrived to ensure safety. At this stage, it is possible the email came from another state. The investigation will reveal the details," Arya said.

High Court Bar Association President B. D. Hiremath praised the prompt action. "We discussed the matter with the registrar and police. Everyone, including clients, was sent out quickly. The police worked tirelessly to inspect the building. People are naturally scared when life is threatened. We will request more police personnel be deployed to prevent such situations in the future," he said.

After a complete search, authorities confirmed that no explosive device was present. Judges, lawyers, staff, and clients were allowed to return, and court proceedings resumed as usual. A similar threat was reported in Mysore, where lawyers and clients also evacuated after receiving a bomb warning by email. The local police and bomb squad inspected the premises and confirmed the threat was false.

These incidents have raised concerns about court security across the state. Officials emphasized that, while no danger was found, vigilance is necessary. Authorities assured the public that investigations are ongoing to trace the origin of the emails and prevent any future disruptions.

The swift response by the police and bomb squad was widely appreciated, showing the importance of emergency preparedness in maintaining safety at judicial institutions. Court operations have now returned to normal in both Dharwad and Mysore.

QUICK READ

Call for applications from Folk Art teams

Mandya

The District Health and Family Welfare Department has invited applications from interested folk art teams to perform street plays, songs, and other cultural programs in selected villages across Mandya to raise public awareness about health and welfare schemes for 2025–26. Teams registered with the Song & Drama Division, Department of Kannada & Culture, or the Department of Information & Public Relations are eligible. Applications must be submitted to the District Health Office, ICC Division, by January 14. Selected teams will showcase performances before the district selection committee on January 16 at 11:30 am at the District IEC Division, Mandya. Teams must arrange their own costumes and musical instruments. Successful teams will be allocated programs across taluks.

Training camp for excise electronic auction today: Excise DC

K'taka Excise Department is set to conduct a statewide e-auction of liquor licences, with bidder training today session

KOLAR

Preparations are underway for a transparent electronic auction of liquor licenses across the state, including 477 retail liquor shops and 92 bars. To ensure clarity and smooth participation, a special training camp has been arranged for prospective bidders today (January 7) at 11 a.m. at Ranga Mandira in Kolar city, announced Kolar Excise Deputy Commissioner Syed Azmat Afreen.

Addressing the media at the Excise Department office, she explained that the state government had earlier imposed a ban on issuing CL-2 and CL-9 licenses since 1992 due to several administrative reasons, resulting in 569 pending licenses. With the decision now taken to auction these licenses through an electronic system, the training camp will

help participants understand the process thoroughly, including technical procedures and documentation requirements.

Additional Excise Commissioner Basavaraj Somanna and officials from MSTC, the agency conducting the e-auction, will participate in the camp to clarify doubts and guide participants through every aspect of the bidding system. The training is intended for interested applicants from both Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts.

A 26 percent reservation has been earmarked for SC, ST, and their sub-categories, while the remaining outlets will be open for the general category. Though the auction is open to bidders nationwide, reservation benefits will apply only to residents of Karnataka, the Deputy Commissioner clarified.

The direct electronic auction is scheduled to be held from January 13 to 20. Excise officials expressed confidence that the training will facilitate transparent participation and encourage competitive bidding.

Excise Inspector Suma Ramesh was present during the briefing.

District-level siridhanya fair to be held on January 8

CHIKKABALLAPUR

A district-level Siridhanya (millets) fair will be organized on January 8 at 10:30 a.m. at the Netaji Stadium in Hirebidanur, Gauribidanur taluk. The event is being jointly hosted by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, and Agriculture Department of Chikkaballapur.

Higher Education Minister and district in-charge Dr. M.C. Sudhakar will inaugurate the fair, while Agriculture Minister N. Cheluvarayaswamy will participate as chief guest. The programme will be chaired by Gauribidanur MLA K.H. Puttaswamy Gowda.

MPs Dr. K. Sudhakar and M. Muniswamy, along with legislators S.N. Subbareddy, B.N. Ravikumar, P.E. Pradeep Eshwar, MLC Chidanand M. Gowda, MLA Anil Kumar, Dr. T. Srinivas and Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, will be present. Several board chairpersons, including N.H. Shivashankar Reddy, N. Sannangi, K.N. Keshavareddy, Golahalli Shivanarasimhaiah, Anjanappa, Dr. B.C. Madakari, and B.G. Ganesh, will also participate. District Guarantee Scheme Chairman N. Ramesh will attend as well.

Chikkaballapur to host district-level Siridhanya fair on January 8 at Gauribidanur promoting millets farmer empowerment sustainable farming and public awareness across district

Senior officials from the Agriculture Department, Science and Technology, Biotechnology, and various government wings, including District Panchayat CEO Dr. N. Manjula, will take part. Officials from Jal Nigam, Agriculture Directorate, Watershed Development, and other departments will also participate.

Representatives of farmer associations from across the district, taluk-level farmers' forums, cooperative organizations, departmental staff, civil society members, and the public are expected to attend in large numbers. The fair aims to promote millet production, awareness, sustainable agriculture, and farmer empowerment, while encouraging healthy dietary habits among the public.

Farmers launch hunger strike demanding withdrawal of land acquisition

RAMANAGARA

Marking the historic day when Mahatma Gandhi visited Bidadi on January 6, 1934, farmers from Byramangala and Kanchuganahalli panchayat limits have begun a silent hunger satyagraha demanding cancellation of the proposed Bidadi Smart Township project. Members of the Farmers' Land Protection Committee, including many women, staged a peaceful protest near Byramangala Circle urging the government not to acquire their fertile agricultural land for the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township.

Former Taluk Panchayat member and farmers' leader Prakash said Gandhi's ideals emphasised self-reliance through agriculture, village development and Swadeshi. "Is development only about global cities, flyovers and luxury projects? Destroying thousands of farmer families for township projects can never define real progress," he questioned.

He recalled that permission for the township was first granted in 2006 and the government is now reviving the 9,600-acre project after 19 years. Farmers fear displacement of 26 villages and loss of livelihoods of cultivators, dairy farmers and sericulture growers. They warned the government against repeating past mistakes, citing the long protest in Devanahalli where farmers successfully resisted large-scale land acquisition.

The protestors appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar—who call themselves followers of Gandhi—to respect Gandhian values and protect farmers' land. The indefinite hunger satyagraha will continue until the land acquisition process is withdrawn, leaders declared. Numerous farmer leaders and public supporters participated in solidarity.

Penang, Karnataka to partner in semiconductor and technology

BENGALURU

The Government of Karnataka on Tuesday hosted a high-level delegation from Penang, Malaysia, to explore strategic collaboration in semiconductors, deep tech, space technology, smart cities, skilling and innovation-led growth. The delegation, led by Penang Deputy Chief Minister II Jagdeep Singh Deo, included senior state officials, representatives from Penang Island City Council and officials from the Consulate General of Malaysia, Chennai.

The team held discussions with Karnataka IT & BT Minister Priyank Kharge and Dr. Manjula N., IAS, Secretary, Department of Electronics, IT, BT and S&T, along with senior officials. Both sides highlighted strong complementarities—Karnataka's strength in software, chip design, startups, R&D and deep tech, and Penang's global leadership in semiconductor manufacturing, advanced materials and electronics industrialisation.

The delegation expressed willingness to move towards a formal MoU to institutionalise cooperation. Priority focus areas identified include semiconductors and chip design, talent exchange, joint skilling programmes, deep tech, smart cities and space applications.

Minister Priyank Kharge emphasised Karnataka's ecosystem-driven model and stressed structured skilling corridors to address global semiconductor workforce demand. Penang officials highlighted the

state's five-decade legacy as a leading global semiconductor hub, noting ongoing expansion into high-end chip design and advanced engineering.

A major discussion theme was talent development, including joint certification programmes, academic–industry partnerships and exchange initiatives enabling engineers from both regions to access advanced R&D and industrial ecosystems.

Opportunities for collaboration in satellite-based telecom, disaster response, environmental monitoring and weather analytics were also discussed, with Karnataka showcasing its growing private space ecosystem alongside ISRO partnerships.

Karnataka also highlighted its position as India's startup capital with over 25,000 startups and strong deep tech presence under its "Deep Tech Decade" initiative, proposing collaboration through the Global Innovation Alliance platform for startup exchanges, market access and co-funded innovation programmes.

Association warns public against fraudulent fund collection

BENGALURU

The Karnataka Badigedarara Kshemabhivruddhi Kendra Samithi (R), Bengaluru, has issued a public alert after receiving reports that certain individuals are allegedly collecting money and conducting financial transactions using the association's name, address and forged letterheads. The association stated that its registered offices are located at Rannatha Pura, Basaveshwaranagara and Kamakshipalya in Bengaluru, and any activities conducted outside authorised channels should be treated as suspicious.

According to the association, miscreants have been misleading people by falsely claiming official links with the Samithi and demanding payments in its name. The organisation has categorically clarified that it has not authorised any such individuals or agencies to collect funds or enter into financial dealings on its behalf.

The Samithi has warned that strict disciplinary and legal action will be initiated against anyone found misusing its identity, address or issuing communications using fake or fabricated letterheads. It has also advised the public to thoroughly verify the authenticity of any communication or financial demand by contacting the association directly before making any payments.

Further, the organisation has clarified that it will not take responsibility for any monetary losses or transactions made without its official knowledge or approval. The public has been urged to remain vigilant and report any such fraudulent activities immediately.

The statement was issued by Secretary Soma Shankar on behalf of the association, with the concurrence of office-bearers including Hon. President Sri Umashankar, President Smt Seethalakshmi G.P., Vice President Sri R. Krishnamurthy and Treasurer Sri Guru Raja Rao Sandal.

Applications invited to manage 'Akka Café' in Bengaluru Rural

BENGALURU RURAL

The Bengaluru Rural Zilla Panchayat has invited applications from interested women members of Sanjeevini Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to manage the Akka Café established within the Zilla Panchayat premises. Application forms are available at Sanjeevini branches of all taluk panchayats, gram panchayats, and Sanjeevini federations. Duly filled forms along with required documents must be submitted to the District Sanjeevini Mission Management Unit, Zilla Panchayat, Bengaluru Rural, by January 8, 2026, before 5.30 pm. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered, informed ZP CEO Dr. K.N. Anuradha.

Only SHGs registered under NRLM in the district are eligible. Priority will be given to groups with experience and interest in food services. Eligible SHGs under Gram Panchayat or Cluster Federations with investment capacity will receive preference. Applicants should not have outstanding loans with any federation or financial institution. Selected groups must strictly follow government guidelines issued from time to time and participate in training programmes at the state, district and taluk levels. Each selected SHG must consist of a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10 women members and should commit to the Akka Café grading process.

Applicants must attach MIS registration details, proof of culinary training (if any), confirmation of working capital contribution, loan clearance certificate, willingness to work as a group, readiness to attend training, and commitment to follow government directives, the release added.

Follow road safety rules to prevent fatal accidents: Judge Savita P.R.

RAMANAGARA

Senior Civil Judge and Member-Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Savita P.R., appealed to motorists to strictly follow traffic rules and speed limits to prevent accidents, stressing that nothing is more precious than human life.

She was speaking after inaugurating the 37th National Road Safety Month – January 2026 programme, organised at the RTO premises in collaboration with the district administration, District Legal Services Authority, police department and the District Road Safety Committee.

Judge Savita said accidents have turned roads into a cause of fear despite their necessity. She urged motorists to adopt simple precautions, such as wearing helmets and seat belts, avoiding drunk driving, maintaining safe distance between vehicles, refraining from mobile phone use while driving, and ensuring vehicles are in proper condition.

"Patience is the most essential quality for every driver. Those who rush can never be good drivers. Only those who follow rules and drive responsibly can ensure safety," she added.

NAME CHANGE

Ramanagara Town-562159, Ward No. 27, 4th Cross, Vivekanandanagara, and now residing at: K.H.B. Platinum Apartment, D Block, No. 308, Satellite Town, Kengeri, Bengaluru-560060, I am Sowmya .S. daughter of Shiva Shaila Raje Urs H.B. and wife of B.G. Deepak Raje Urs, residing at the said address. My original name is Sowmya .S. which is mentioned in my Aadhar card (Aadhar No. 5499 2732 3208) and educational records. Since it was customary to call me as Mouna .S. at home, my name is Mouna .S. in some records of the Revenue Department. It is correct to state that the names entered in all the above documents, i.e. Sowmya S. and Mouna S. are mine. I have certified before B.M. Srivatsa, Notary, Ramanagara, on 05-01-2026 that I will henceforth deal with my name as Sowmya S.

NAME CHANGE

I, **ANIS AHMED**, S/o Mohammed Rafiq, resident of No 27, 3rd Main Road, Rahmath Nagar, RT Nagar Post, Bengaluru-560032, have changed my name to ANEES AHMED, vide affidavit dated: 06.01.2026, before Notary G. DAYANANDA, Bengaluru.

NAME CHANGE

I, **SALMAN**, S/o. Ali Sab, resident of. NO 414/A Ramachandra Layout, 4th Cross, Lingarajapuram, Bangalore North, Bangalore -560084, have changed my name to **SALMAN ALI SAB**, vide affidavit dated: 06.01.2026, before Notary C.SHARADA, Bengaluru.

NAME CHANGE

I, **MOHAMED ALLAUDDIN ALIYAS ARIF AHAMED** S/o Sirajuddin, resident of LIG-22, 2nd Main Road, KHB Colony Jaipura Road Tilak Park Police Station Tumkur, 572101 Karnataka, have changed my name to **MOHAMMED ALLAUDDIN**, vide affidavit dated: 01.01.2026, before Notary M. SHAFIQ AHMED, TUMAKURU.

The Bangalore City Co-operative Bank Limited
No. 3, Pampa Mahakavi Road, Chamarajpet, Bengaluru-560 018.
Office Ph.No. 26678572 : 26600512: 26609066, E-mail : accounts@bccbl.co.in

NOTICE TO CONCERNED PARTIES

This is to inform that below mentioned persons have availed locker facility in our Bank and failed to pay rent for locker or not operated for more then seven years. The bank has sent Registered notices to the latest addresses intimating to pay the rent arrears / to operate the locker and such notices have been returned undelivered. Therefore, this Paper Notification is issued asking the parties to pay the rent arrears / to operate the locker within 15 days failing which necessary action will be initiated to break open the related locker at the cost of locker holder even without his / her presence and to take further action.

Name and address of the locker holders	Locker No. & Branch
Smt. Thamarai Selvi D/o Muniswamy, No. 11/2, Madilu, Maruthi Layout, Indira Colony, Attiguppe, Bengaluru-560040.	Locker No.BIG V1-264, (Old No. 75) Head Office Branch

Place : Bengaluru
Date : 06.01.2026
Sd/- General Manager
The Bangalore City Co-operative Bank Limited

Governor of Karnataka
Office of the Executive Engineer, Panchayat Raj Engineering Division, Davanagere
ಸಂ:ಕಾಪಾಇಂ/ಪಂರಾಇಂ/ವಿ/ದಾ/ಸ.ಇಂ/ಟೆಂಡರ್/2025–26/2186
ದಿನಾಂಕ:–6/1/2026

Short time Tender Invited (KPPP Portal)

Executive Engineer, Panchayath raj Engineering Division, Davanagere here by invited tender from PWD Registered contractors for the item rates through KPPP Portal. There are 27 works have been called, Indent No. 20933, 20934, 20938, 21752, 21749, 22579, 22580, 22,657, 22660, 22661, 22664, 22667, 22668, 22671, 22673, 22675, 22676, 22679, 22681, 22682, 22684, 22686, 22688, 22743, 22745, 22747 & 22640 standard of tender documents KW-1 & KW-2 & KW-3 for price cost Rs.6.70 to 83.90 lakhs respectively and also highest & lowest EMD has as per KPPP portal for each work. Nature of work is Roads, Drians and Buildings. The last date for submission of tender bid is on date: 14/1/2025 5.00 PM for any office information/clarification please contact the below singed office Ph no:08192-250156 and also search website for www.KPPP.karnataka.gov.in

ವಾಸಾಇ/ಡಿವಿಜಿ/624/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಸಿಎ/2025–26
Sd/- Executive Engineer
P.R.E. Division, Davanagere

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Office of the Executive Engineer, No.1, Building Division, SJP Campus, Bengaluru, Phone: 080-22255210
No. EE/Bld.1/AE-3/AE-2/AE-5/2025-26/68 Date:05.01.2026

INVITATION FOR TENDER (IFT)

The above Department invites Tenders through e-procurement portal of GoK **(http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in)** from eligible Tenderers for **providing Painting, Polishing, replacing of aluminium doors, UPVC windows, vinyl flooring, installation of SS Railing, Repairs and Replacement of damaged water supply pipelines and sanitary pipelines, Repairs and Renovation works, providing sofa set, providing tables, chairs and other development works, total of 08 works at various notified places in Bengaluru.** Approx. value of work: **Min. Rs. 3.21 lakhs, Max. Rs. 27.50 lakhs.** EMD: **Min. Rs. 8,100/-, Max. Rs. 55,100/-** Cost of Document: **As in e-portal.** Period of Completion: **from 2 Months to 3 Months for each work.** Last date for downloading Tender through e-procurement portal and submission through online: **13.01.2026 up to 5.00 PM.** Date of opening the Tender: **as per e-procurement guidelines.** Further information, brief details of the works, approx. amount, EMD, etc. can be obtained from the above office or from e-procurement portal **http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in**

Sd/- Executive Engineer
DIPR/DD-C.P/4878/KSMCA/2025-26

CH CLASSIFIEDS
To place a classified ad contact: **080-41209042**

QUICK READ

NHAI reaches out to DoT Trai to improve mobile network

New Delhi

State-owned NHAI on Tuesday said it has sought urgent intervention from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Trai to improve mobile network connectivity on National Highways. NHAI in a statement said as part of a comprehensive assessment undertaken by the state-owned agency, 424 locations covering about 1,750 km across the National Highway network have been identified as critically affected due to non-availability of the mobile network connectivity. Identifying critical mobile network connectivity issues across several stretches of National Highways.

Srinagar records minus 4 degrees Celsius

Srinagar

An intense cold wave continued across Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday with the minimum temperature dropping to minus 4 degrees Celsius in Srinagar city. According to the Meteorological Department, no major Western Disturbance is likely to affect Jammu and Kashmir till January 20, implying that the prospects of a major snowfall are bleak at least till January 20. Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of minus 4 degrees Celsius, Gulmarg minus 8.6 degrees Celsius and Pahalgam minus 6.8 degrees Celsius. Jammu city witnessed a minimum temperature of 5.2 degrees Celsius, followed by Katra 4.8 degrees Celsius, Batote 1.7 degrees Celsius.

20 kg heroin seized in Punjab

Chandigarh

In a major crackdown on trans-border smuggling, Punjab Police's Anti-Narcotics Task Force (Border Range), in a joint operation with the Border Security Force (BSF), have recovered 20 kg heroin and apprehended four accused, including the key operative managing the supply chain, state Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said on Tuesday. He said preliminary investigation revealed that the accused is linked to Pakistan-based handlers and was coordinating the delivery and distribution of drug consignments across the region. A First Information Report (FIR) has been registered under the NDPS Act, and the investigation is underway to identify cross-border handlers.

NHRC Directs Railway Board to Probe Allegations

NHRC has sought a detailed probe into allegations of minority-based reservation changes in IRCTC tenders during 2010

KOLKATA

A bench of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Railway Board to investigate a serious complaint alleging that statutory reservation norms were altered during 2010, when Mamata Banerjee was serving as the Union Minister for Railways. The complaint claims that the changes were made under the guise of providing minority preference, resulting in a reduction of constitutionally mandated reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

According to the petition placed before the NHRC, amendments were allegedly introduced in the tendering policy of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). These amendments reportedly provided reservation benefits to minorities in the awarding of contracts for operating railway catering stalls and canteens across the country. The complainant has argued that such a move amounts to discrimination, as the Constitution of India does not provide for religion-based reservation in public employment or government contracts.

Mamata Banerjee became the Union Railways Minister in 2009 after being elected to the Lok Sabha for a sixth consecutive term from the Kolkata Dakshin constituency. She served in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-II government headed by the then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Her tenure at the Railways lasted until 2011, when she resigned to assume office as the Chief Minister of West Bengal following the Assembly elections that brought an end to the state's 34-year-long Left Front rule.

During this relatively brief period at the helm of the Railways, the policy change in question is alleged to have been introduced, earmarking a certain percentage of IRCTC catering contracts for minorities. Critics argue that this effectively diluted the existing reservation framework meant for historically disadvantaged communities, raising concerns about equality before law and adherence to constitutional principles.

Taking cognisance of the complaint, the NHRC bench has now asked the Railway Board to conduct a thorough inquiry into the matter and submit a detailed report. The Commission is expected to examine whether the policy amendment violated constitutional provisions, statutory reservation norms, or the rights of SC, ST, and OBC communities.

Minor Detained for Alleged Espionage, Statewide Alert

Continued from page 1

A 15-year-old boy was taken into custody in Pathankot district of Punjab on allegations of spying and sharing sensitive information related to India with handlers based in Pakistan. The case has prompted the police to issue a statewide alert amid growing concerns that hostile intelligence agencies are attempting to recruit minors through social media platforms.

According to officials, the minor, a resident of Jammu's Samba district, was allegedly in contact with operatives of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for nearly a year. Investigators claim that he shared confidential data, photographs, and details of sensitive military installations through social media applications. Police sources confirmed that incriminating chat histories and call records were recovered from the boy's mobile phone during a preliminary examination.

Senior Superintendent of Police Daljinder Singh Dhillon, who is posted in Pathankot, told the media that the boy was taken into custody after intelligence inputs indicated that he was supplying information affecting national security. He was allegedly in touch with frontal organisations of terror agencies, ISI, and officers linked to the Pakistan military, the SSP said, adding that the matter is being handled with utmost seriousness due to its sensitive nature.

A 15-year-old boy's detention in Pathankot for alleged espionage has triggered statewide security alerts across Punjab.

Officials revealed that the boy was emotionally vulnerable, believing that his father had been murdered. This emotional distress is believed to have been exploited by Pakistani agencies, which allegedly lured him through online platforms. The child appears to have fallen into the trap through social media. His mental state made him susceptible to manipulation, a senior police officer said.

Following sustained surveillance and technical analysis, the boy's digital communications were traced to Pakistan-based handlers, leading to his detention. During questioning, police discovered that he was not acting alone. Investigators now suspect that several other children may be in contact with ISI operatives, raising alarm within the security establishment.

In response, alerts have been sent to police stations across Punjab, directing officers to remain vigilant and identify any similar attempts at targeting minors. The case has heightened concerns among Indian security agencies, which fear a broader strategy to recruit young and impressionable individuals for espionage. A senior Punjab Police official admitted that this emerging trend poses a significant security risk.

A bomb threat aboard a Gorakhpur-bound train sparked panic, forcing evacuation and intensive security checks at Mau station

Bomb Threat Triggers Panic on Gorakhpur–Mumbai Train

GORAKHPUR

Panic erupted on Tuesday after a bomb threat was reported on a train travelling from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai in Maharashtra, prompting swift action from multiple security agencies. Following the alert, the train was immediately stopped at Mau railway station, where passengers were evacuated as a precautionary measure and a thorough search operation was launched.

Senior police officials, including the Superintendent of Police (SP), along with a large contingent of police personnel, rushed to the station soon after the threat was received. The train was en route from Gorakhpur to Lokmanya Tilak Terminus when the warning triggered emergency protocols.

Travelling Ticket Examiner Ram Prabhav Yadav said the crew acted promptly after receiving the information. We were informed about a possible bomb threat. With great effort, the train was stopped, and all passengers were safely evacuated. After that, the checking process began, he said. Emphasising passenger safety, Yadav added that all travellers had been moved to a secure location and urged them not to panic. He assured that once security procedures were completed, passengers would be allowed to continue their journey on the same train.

Security teams from the local police, the Government Railway Police (GRP), and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) carried out an intensive inspection of all coaches and luggage. Sniffer dogs and technical teams were also deployed as part of the search to rule out any threat to passenger safety. Officials said the operation was conducted methodically to ensure that no suspicious object was overlooked.

Authorities later indicated that the situation was under control, though the search operation continued for several hours, causing delays and inconvenience to passengers. No explosive material was reported to have been found during the checks.

Telangana CID arrests Falcon MD

HYDERABAD

The Telangana Police have arrested Falcon Group Managing Director Amar Deep in a digital investment scam case. Officials of the Crime Investigation Department (CID) arrested him in Mumbai, soon after he arrived from the Gulf.

Based on specific inputs received from immigration authorities, the police intercepted Amar Deep in Mumbai. The CID team acted swiftly to arrest him. The CID had already issued a lookout circular against Amar Deep, who had allegedly fled to Dubai after the scam came to light. Police sources said he was being brought to Hyderabad and will be produced before a court.

According to police, the accused had siphoned off Rs 850 crore from investors by floating app-based digital deposit schemes. In July last year, the CID had arrested Falcon Group's Chief Operating Officer (COO) Aaryan Singh. Aaryan Singh alias Aaryan Singh Chhabra was apprehended by the CID at Bathinda, Punjab, on July 4. In May, Falcon Chief Executive Officer Yogendra Singh was arrested. So far, 10 accused have been arrested in the case. According to CID, it is a case of collection of unauthorised deposits, criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal conspiracy, wherein the accused cheated the depositors, by developing Falcon Invoice Discounting Application, and created fake deals in the name of reputed MNCs, induced the depositors under the pretext of high interest rates with short term plans and collected about Rs 4,215 crore from 7,056 depositors. About 4,065 victims were cheated. Capital Protection Force Pvt Ltd had allegedly developed the Falcon Invoice Discounting Application and advertised through Social Media platforms.

Bengal experiences spine-chilling cold

KOLKATA

Cold conditions continued unabated in West Bengal on Tuesday, with Kolkata recording the coldest day in past 13 years. On Tuesday, the minimum temperature in the city dropped to 10.2 degrees Celsius, 3.7 degrees below normal. The maximum temperature in Kolkata was 18.4 degrees Celsius, which is 6.7 degrees below normal.

This sharp drop in minimum temperature, coupled with the free flow of northerly winds, resulted in bone-chilling cold in Kolkata and across the state. This is the lowest temperature in Kolkata in January in the last 13 years. On January 9, 2013, the minimum temperature in Kolkata dropped to 9 degrees Celsius. On January 22, 2003, the minimum temperature in Kolkata was 9.3 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, in some parts of the suburbs and surrounding areas, the temperature dropped below 10 degrees Celsius on Tuesday morning.

A light blanket of fog was also observed in Kolkata from early morning. However, the surrounding districts started to be covered by dense fog.

This winter season has been marked by dense fog, light rain and even snowfall. These conditions are predicted to persist strongly in the weather of Bengal for the next seven days. An official of the Regional Meteorological Centre in Kolkata's Alipore said, Cold day conditions will prevail in nine districts of the state.

Madras HC upholds order allowing lamp lighting

MADURAI

The Madras High Court's Madurai Bench on Tuesday upheld a single judge's order allowing the lighting of a lamp on the Thiruparankundram hill here. It slammed the DMK government, saying it should not "stoop to that level" to achieve its "political agenda". A Division Bench of Justices G Jayachandran and KK Ramakrishnan delivered the judgment, making it clear that the spot on which the stone pillar (Deepathoon) is located belongs to the Sri Subramania Swamy Temple. The Tamil Nadu government indicated moving the Supreme Court in appeal against the order. The appellants failed to produce "formidable evidence" to show that Agama Sastra of Saivites prohibits lighting a lamp at a place which is not straight on top of the deity in the sanctum sanctorum, the court observed.

CM Stalin to inaugurate Pongal gift distribution

CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin will inaugurate the distribution of the Pongal gift package at a fair price shop in Alandur, Chennai, on Thursday, marking the start of the State's annual festive assistance to ration card holders ahead of the harvest festival. The announcement comes after weeks of public anticipation over whether the traditional Pongal gift package would include a cash component this year. The Tamil Nadu government on Sunday announced Rs 3,000 cash each for rice ration card holders under the Pongal gift hampers. In 2021, under the previous AIADMK government, rice ration card holders received a cash gift of Rs 2,500 along with the Pongal gift hamper.

After the DMK assumed office following the Assembly elections, the State provided Rs 1,000 in cash along with a gift package in 2022, 2023 and 2024. In 2025, however, only the gift package was distributed, without any cash assistance, leading to expectations that monetary support would return in an election year.

Earlier, the Tamil Nadu government issued a Government Order allocating Rs 248 crore for the 2026 Pongal gift package, covering the procurement of one kilogram of raw rice, one kilogram of sugar, and a full sugarcane for each eligible household. The announcement initially sparked concern among the public over the absence of a cash gift.

KARTHIGAI DEEPAM UPHELD

Madurai HC Bench Tradition, Allows Karthigai Deepam

CHENNAI

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday upheld an earlier order permitting the lighting of the traditional Karthigai Deepam on the hilltop at Thiruparankundram Hill, dismissing an appeal filed by the Tamil Nadu government and the temple administration. The ruling reaffirmed the importance of preserving long-standing religious practices linked to the annual festival.

The verdict was delivered by a Division Bench comprising Justices G. Jayachandran and K.K. Ramakrishnan. The Bench confirmed the earlier order passed by single judge Justice G.R. Swaminathan, who had directed the temple authorities to allow the ceremonial lamp to be lit on the hilltop lamp pillar during the annual Karthigai festival.

The dispute arose from a petition seeking permission to light the Karthigai lamp at the hilltop of Thiruparankundram, a site of immense religious and cultural significance near Madurai. The hill is closely associated with the historic temple complex and has been a focal point of devotion for centuries.

Petitioners argued before the court that lighting the Karthigai Deepam on the hilltop was a long-established religious practice intrinsically connected to the temple and the annual celebrations of Karthigai Deepam. They contended that the ritual had strong historical roots and was an integral part of local religious tradition, observed by devotees for generations.

Opposing the plea, the state government and the temple administration claimed there was no conclusive evidence to prove the existence of a lamp pillar on the hilltop. They also expressed apprehensions that permitting the lighting of the lamp could lead to law and order issues, citing sensitivities surrounding the hill, which also houses a dargah and is shared by people of different faiths.

However, during proceedings before the single judge, the petitioners produced documentary evidence to counter the government's objections.

Former IOA chief Suresh Kalmadi died at 81

PUNE

Former Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president and senior sports administrator Suresh Kalmadi died at a hospital here early Tuesday. He was 81. Kalmadi, who had been unwell for some time, Died around 3.30 am. He is survived by his wife, a son and daughter-in-law, two married daughters, a son-in-law and grandchildren.

A dominant figure in Indian sports administration for over two decades, Kalmadi served as IOA president from 1996 to 2011, making him among the longest-serving heads of the country's apex Olympic body. Born in 1944, Kalmadi began his career as a fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force and participated in the 1965 and 1971 wars. He later entered politics, representing Pune in the Lok Sabha multiple times as a Congress leader, and served as a Union minister. During his tenure at the IOA, India's engagement with global sport expanded significantly. He also held key international roles, including president of the Asian Athletics Association and member of the IAAF Council.

QUICK READ

CAPF deployment likely to be double compared to past four polls

Kolkata

The deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel for the crucial Assembly elections in West Bengal later this year might be double, compared to what it was during the past four elections in the state, including Assembly elections in 2016 and 2021 and the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 and 2024. The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal, Manoj Kumar Agarwal, attended a meeting chaired by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar at the Election Commission of India's headquarters in New Delhi, where one of the main agenda issues was in relation to the CPAF deployment for Assembly polls in the state this year.

Bengal doctor seeks crowdfunding to pay ₹30 lakh govt bond

Kolkata

Following the announcement made by junior doctor Aniket Mahato, one of the prominent faces seeking justice in the RG Kar rape-murder case, regarding his decision to withdraw from his Senior Resident (SR-ship) position last week, he has now reached out to the public for financial assistance to cover the government bond amounting to Rs 30 lakh. Mahato published a QR code on social media after resigning from his Senior Residency earlier in the day. The QR code contains his bank account number. It has been revealed that Dr Aniket Mahato made public the bank account in his name at the Salt Lake branch of South Indian Bank.

BJP protests outside Delhi Assembly against Kejriwal

New Delhi

The BJP-led Delhi government on Tuesday staged a protest outside the Delhi Assembly, strongly criticising AAP supremo and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over his remarks alleging that government school teachers were being deployed to count stray dogs. The second day of the Winter Session of the Delhi Legislative Assembly witnessed protests by both the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party on different issues. The ruling party targeted the opposition over the dog-counting allegation, while the AAP continued its attack on the Rekha Gupta government over air pollution in the national capital.

'VB-G RAM G Act Will Be Milestone for Viksit Bharat'

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath hailed the VB-G RAM G Act as transformative for rural India

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission – Gramin (VB-G RAM G) Act would prove to be a major milestone in achieving the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. Strongly defending the new rural job law, he criticised the Congress and its allies for opposing what he described as a revolutionary reform aimed at strengthening the rural economy.

Addressing mediapersons, the Chief Minister said the VB-G RAM G Act would significantly boost rural infrastructure and accelerate development across states, laying the foundation for a developed India. He stressed that empowering farmers, labourers, and the rural economy was essential to realise the broader vision of a developed nation. Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Adityanath congratulated him for introducing what he called a forward-looking and people-centric law.

The Congress and its allies are raising various questions on this important legislation. In the interest of the nation, farmers, workers, and rural development, this step should have received full support, the Chief Minister said.

He added that the law reflected the government's commitment to transparency and accountability, and that

people should acknowledge the role of the Prime Minister and the NDA in bringing such reforms.

Adityanath also pointed out that earlier rural employment schemes were plagued by fake job cards, weak social audits, and administrative shortcomings. According to him, these issues prevented the creation of durable assets and failed to deliver sustainable benefits to rural communities. He alleged that parties which ruled the country for decades and looted resources were now opposing the VB-G RAM G Act out of fear that their past failures would be exposed.

The people will question why such reforms were not undertaken when they were in power, he said, accusing the opposition of clinging to an old, corruption-ridden model instead of welcoming meaningful change.

Highlighting key features of the new law, the Chief Minister said the guaranteed employment period had been increased from 100 days to 125 days. He noted that wages would now be paid weekly, eliminating long delays faced by workers in the past. In case of any delay, compensation provisions have also been included, ensuring financial security for labourers.

Quality Is India's Competitive Advantage: Min Pralhad Joshi

NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday said that quality is not merely a regulatory responsibility but also a powerful competitive advantage for India, underlining the vital role standards play in national development. He was addressing the 79th Foundation Day celebrations of the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), where he emphasised that adherence to quality benchmarks strengthens consumer confidence and enhances India's global standing.

Speaking at the event, Joshi said standards act as benchmarks for excellence and trust, helping Indian products compete effectively in both domestic and international markets. Quality is a responsibility as well as a competitive advantage. Standards serve as the foundation for consumer protection, ease of doing business, Make in India, and Aatmanirbhar Bharat, he said, stressing that a robust standards ecosystem is essential for sustainable economic

growth.

The Union Minister recalled the consistent emphasis placed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on quality in governance, service delivery, and manufacturing. He said the Prime Minister has provided a clear vision to make Made in India synonymous with quality, reliability, and global trust. According to Joshi, this focus has guided reforms aimed at improving systems, streamlining processes, and raising product standards across sectors.

Highlighting the broader impact of quality systems, Joshi noted that strong standards protect consumers, improve governance outcomes, and support businesses by making regulatory and operational processes simpler, more transparent, and dependable. He said quality-led growth not only benefits end-users but also creates a level playing field for industry, encouraging innovation and efficiency.

The minister reiterated the government's commitment to the vision of Zero Defect, Zero Effect, which seeks to ensure that products manufactured in India are of the highest quality while minimising environmental impact. He said achieving this vision requires collective effort from policymakers, industry leaders, standards-setting bodies, and manufacturers working together toward shared goals.

Joshi added that India's larger ambition is to move beyond manufacturing to building trust. Our aim is to transform 'Made in India' into 'Trusted by India' and 'Trusted by the World', he said, calling upon all stakeholders to internalise quality as a core value rather than a compliance obligation.

WBBSE issues guidelines for teachers and students in state-run schools

KOLKATA

The West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) has issued guidelines for both teachers and students in state-run and state-aided schools, state Education Department sources said on Tuesday. It has been learned that the WBBSE has issued a new circular for teachers and school authorities. Several instructions have been given in this. However, it has not been made public.

According to the sources, the guidelines stipulate that school teachers will not be allowed to conduct private tuition for personal gain. Also, using smartphones in the classroom is prohibited. Sources said that there have been complaints about teachers using smartphones in the classroom. Now, the

board has clearly said that school authorities have been instructed to keep a close watch to ensure that teaching and learning are not hampered due to the use of mobile phones.

It has been clearly mentioned that no activity that disrupts classroom learning will be permitted.

Sources said that the entry and exit times from schools for teachers have been fixed. The guidelines say that all teachers must be present at the prayer assembly in their respective schools at 10.40 am. Any delay in arrival will be considered 'late'. At the same time, arriving at school after 11.15 a.m. will be considered an absence for the day.

The guidelines also said that students cannot leave school before 4.30 p.m. when the day ends. Furthermore, the headmaster shall be responsible for keeping the school premises tobacco-free and ensuring health awareness and hygiene among the students.

The guidelines also instruct teachers to act as 'nodal teachers' to ensure that the state government's welfare schemes, such as Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathi, etc., are properly reaching the students.

BJP Will Not Compromise on Savarkar Ideology, Ashish Shelar Warns Pawar

MUMBAI

Maharashtra Information Technology Minister and BJP in charge of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections Ashish Shelar on Tuesday issued his strongest warning yet to Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, asserting that the Bharatiya Janata Party would not compromise on its ideological foundations for the sake of political convenience.

Referring to Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Shelar said any party seeking to align with the BJP must accept Savarkar's ideology. We are followers of Savarkar. Our party works on Savarkar's ideology. If you want to be with us, you must accept it. If not, we will move ahead without you. If you stand in opposition, we will treat you as the opposition, Shelar said, delivering a blunt message aimed at the NCP faction led by Ajit Pawar.

Shelar's remarks come amid Ajit Pawar's repeated assertions that the Nationalist Congress Party functions on the ideology of Shiv, Phule, Shahu, and Ambedkar, underlining its secular credentials and indicating that it would not dilute its ideological position. The BJP leader described the alliance with Ajit Pawar's party as unnatural, arguing that coalitions lacking ideological compatibility are inherently unstable and prone to internal conflict.

The sharp exchange has brought simmering tensions within Maharashtra's ruling Mahayuti alliance into public view ahead of crucial municipal elections, including the high-stakes BMC polls. Senior BJP leaders have increasingly issued public warnings to Ajit Pawar, raising questions about the alliance's cohesion and longevity.

The rift deepened after Ajit Pawar, during recent poll campaigning, remarked that allegations worth ₹70,000 crore had once been levelled against him and that he was now sharing power with those who had made those accusations. The comment drew strong reactions from BJP leaders, who criticised the political messaging and its implications for the alliance.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, speaking at a public event in Katraj, cautioned allies against underestimating the BJP, a remark widely interpreted as an assertive signal within the coalition.

ED Attaches ₹50 Cr Assets of Gurugram Realty Group

NEW DELHI

The ED has attached a villa, a hotel, and a resort, besides land parcels and deposits worth over Rs 50 crore, in connection with a homebuyers' fraud" linked money laundering probe against Gurugram-based realty firm Ocean Seven Buildtech Pvt Ltd (OSBPL).

The Enforcement Directorate, in a statement, said that the promoter and key decision-maker of the company, Swaraj Singh Yadav, played a "central role" in orchestrating the scheme and in deliberately diverting funds collected from homebuyers for the construction of houses.

Yadav was arrested by the central probe agency in November as part of the investigation.

Andhra man dies by suicide after killing woman

TIRUPATI

A man allegedly killed a woman after she refused to continue their extramarital relationship and later died by suicide in Tirupati, police said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as Somasekhar, who was working as gas delivery boy, slit the throat of the victim, identified as Lakshmi, at his room. Both the accused and the victim were in their early 30s.

Lakshmi, a native of Khammam from neighbouring Telangana State, had been residing in Jeevakona area along with her husband and son. She was working at a roadside eatery near the RTC bus stand in the temple town.

Somashekar was a resident of Guttivaripalli in Renigunta mandal of Tirupati district, and was working at a gas agency in Tirupati town as the delivery boy. After separation from his wife, he was living alone at a room in Maruti Nagar, Korlagunta on the outskirts of the town.

Lakshmi had recently migrated to Tirupati along with her husband and son for livelihood and was working at a samosa shop near the bus stand. According to police, Somasekhar developed acquaintance with Lakshmi during gas cylinder deliveries to the samosa shop where she was working. This friendship later developed into an affair.

The accused became enraged when Lakshmi refused to continue the relationship. Police said he allegedly called her to his residence under the pretext of meeting her for the last time. During their conversation, an argument ensued, and Somashekhar became furious after she asked him to end the relationship. He brutally murdered Lakshmi by slitting her throat with a knife. After committing the crime, he hanged himself from the ceiling fan in the same room.

The incident came to light when people in the adjacent house became grew suspicious and informed the police.

GIRIRAJ TARGETS OWAISI

Giriraj Singh Targets Owaisi Over 'Love Jihad' Remark

PATNA

Union Textile Minister Giriraj Singh on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on Asaduddin Owaisi, accusing the AIMIM president of promoting what he described as a jihadi mindset in connection with the controversial 'love jihad' issue. Singh's remarks came in response to Owaisi's demand that the government present data on alleged cases of love jihad in Parliament.

Speaking to reporters in Patna, the Begusarai Member of Parliament said that Owaisi's questions should first be addressed in Hyderabad, where the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) holds significant political influence. Singh argued that if Owaisi was genuinely concerned about transparency and facts, he should seek clarity within regions where his party has a strong presence.

Owaisi talks about data on love jihad and wants it to be discussed in Parliament. Before that, he should answer these questions in Hyderabad, where his party has power

and influence, Singh said. He alleged that the AIMIM chief was attempting to politicise a sensitive issue instead of addressing concerns at the grassroots level.

The Union Minister further claimed that statements made by Owaisi reflected a mindset that, according to him, sought to divide society along communal lines. This kind of thinking promotes a jihadi mindset and does not help in maintaining harmony in the country, Singh said, reiterating his criticism of the AIMIM leader's stance.

Singh also asserted that issues related to women's safety and social harmony should not be reduced to political rhetoric. He said that governments and political leaders have a responsibility to ensure that vulnerable sections of society are protected, rather than engaging in debates that could inflame tensions.

The remarks come amid ongoing political sparring between the BJP and AIMIM over issues such as religious conversion, interfaith marriages, and alleged cases of coercion, commonly referred to by some groups as 'love jihad'. While Owaisi has repeatedly dismissed the term as politically motivated and unsupported by data, leaders from the BJP have maintained that the issue deserves serious attention.

Turning modern educational campuses into centres of unrest will not benefit

NEW DELHI

As slogans were raised against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus by Left-wing student groups, the BJP on Tuesday criticised the incident, stating that turning modern educational campuses into centres of unrest and disorder serves no one's interest. BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said, If modern educational campuses become centres of unrest and disorder, it will certainly reflect the activities of such radical syndicates. Slogans like 'Modi, your grave will be dug' or 'Amit Shah, your grave will be dug' are part of these syndicates, whose political motives target Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The government will take action, and anyone involved in such activities will face strict legal consequences. I believe that turning modern educational campuses into centres of unrest and disorder is neither in the interest of the students, nor the faculty, nor the institution itself, nor the country.

QUICK READ

Malaysia's Ex-PM Mahathir hospitalized after fall

Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, 100, has been hospitalized after breaking his hip in a fall at home early Tuesday. He is receiving treatment and observation at the National Heart Institute and is expected to stay for several weeks. Mahathir, known for transforming Malaysia into an industrial nation during his first 22-year tenure from 1981 to 2003, also served briefly as prime minister again in 2018. He has a history of heart issues and past hospitalizations. Despite health challenges, the centenarian remains a prominent figure in Malaysian politics and public life.

Pope Leo urges kindness as holy year ends

Vatican City

Pope Leo XIV closed the Catholic Church's Holy Year on Tuesday by sealing the "Holy Door" at St. Peter's Basilica, calling on Christians to help those in need and treat foreigners with compassion. He highlighted the 33.5 million pilgrims who visited Rome, urging them not to see people as commodities. The Pope criticized profit-driven economies and asked believers to recognize humanity in visitors and strangers. The 2025 jubilee, opened by Pope Francis and closed by Leo, drew pilgrims from 185 countries. The next Holy Year is expected around 2033, marking 2,000 years since Jesus' death.

Mayon volcano alert raised as activity intensifies

Manila

Philippine authorities raised Mayon Volcano's alert level to 3 on Tuesday after dome collapse activity increased, signaling a possible magmatic eruption. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) reported repeated rockfalls, four volcanic earthquakes, and unstable lava dome movement since January 1. Alert Level 3 indicates higher chances of lava flows, pyroclastic density currents, and explosive activity in the coming days or weeks. Residents within six kilometres of the volcano are urged to evacuate and follow official guidance. Mayon, the country's most active volcano, has a long history of eruptions, and authorities stress vigilance for public safety.

Deadly floods hit North Sulawesi island

At least 444 Indonesians were evacuated due to floods, staying in shelters while equipment clears roads and damaged homes

JAKARTA

Flash floods triggered by heavy rain have killed at least 14 people in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province, while four others are still missing, officials said on Tuesday.

The disaster struck early on Monday on Siau Island, part of the Siau Tagulandang Biaro region, after intense rainfall caused rivers to overflow and fast-moving water to sweep through villages. Many victims were carried away by sudden surges of water, according to local rescue authorities.

Nuriadin Gumeleng, a spokesperson for the regional rescue agency, said search operations are ongoing. Sixteen rescue workers have been deployed to locate the four people who remain unaccounted for. He added that at least 18 people were injured in the floods, with some requiring hospital treatment.

Rescuers are also gathering information from residents to check if more people are missing. As of Tuesday, several main roads were still blocked by thick mud, fallen rocks, and debris, making rescue and relief work difficult.

Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency said at least 444 residents have been evacuated from affected areas. Many are now staying in temporary shelters set up in schools and churches. Heavy equipment, including excavators, has been sent to clear roads and reopen access to cut-off communities. North Sulawesi Governor Yulius Selvanus said the floods damaged or destroyed hundreds of homes as well as several government buildings, leaving many families without shelter.

The floods occurred during the peak of the rainy season in Sulawesi, as forecast by Indonesia's weather agency. Authorities have warned that several regions, including Java, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua, face higher flood risks in January and February.

In recent years, Indonesia has seen increasingly severe floods. Environmental groups say deforestation linked to mining and logging has worsened the impact of extreme weather, making communities more vulnerable to disasters.

Machado vows return, calls for Venezuela election

WASHINGTON

Venezuela's main opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has said she plans to return to her country soon and push for fresh elections, declaring her movement ready to win a democratic vote.

Machado praised US President Donald Trump for the arrest of President Nicolas Maduro, calling it a historic moment for Venezuela. She said the opposition believes a political transition must now move forward.

Machado claimed the opposition won the 2024 election by a wide margin despite what she described as unfair conditions. She said that in a free and fair vote, the opposition would secure an overwhelming victory.

She did not reveal where she is currently staying or give details of how she plans to return. Machado is wanted by Venezuelan authorities, and supporters of the ruling Socialist Party still control much of the state machinery. Trump, however, has signalled caution. He has said Venezuela needs stability before any election can take place and has called quick polls unrealistic.

The US administration is reportedly considering working with interim President Delcy Rodriguez, a close ally of Maduro. Machado strongly criticised this approach, accusing Rodriguez of corruption, abuse, and close ties with foreign powers. She said such leaders lack the trust of Venezuelans and international investors.

The US may engage interim President Delcy Rodriguez, Maduro ally, prompting Machado's criticism over corruption, foreign ties, and lack of trust from Venezuelans and international investors

Machado praised Trump's actions, saying they marked the defeat of a long-running dictatorship. She said Venezuela could rebuild democracy, revive its oil industry, welcome back millions of migrants, and restore rule of law. Maduro, now in US custody, has pleaded not guilty to drug-related charges in a New York court. His wife has also denied the allegations.

Inside Venezuela, tensions remain high. Authorities have ordered arrests of those accused of helping the US operation, while officials insist the situation is calm. Analysts say Venezuela now faces an uncertain period, with political change, stability, and international pressure all shaping what comes next.

WHAT CHARGES DOES MADURO FACE?

- The indictment alleged Maduro and his allies "provided law enforcement cover and logistical support" to major drug trafficking groups.
- Maduro is accused of selling Venezuelan diplomatic passports to known drug traffickers and facilitating flights under diplomatic cover.
- Maduro was indicted on four counts: narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, possession of machine guns.
- The first lady is accused of ordering kidnappings and murders, as well as accepting bribes in 2007 to arrange a meeting between drug traffickers and the director of Venezuela's National Anti-Drug Office.

Bangladesh elections see women largely excluded

DHAKA

Women remain largely missing from Bangladesh's election race despite making up nearly half of the country's population, according to data released by the Election Commission.

Out of 51 political parties contesting the February 12 national polls, 30 have not fielded a single female candidate. The figures highlight a deep gender gap in political representation.

Among 2,568 candidates in the race, only 109 are women, accounting for just over four per cent. Of these, 72 have been nominated by political parties, while the rest are contesting as independents.

The exclusion is most visible among religious parties. Jamaat-e-Islami fielded 276 candidates without nominating any women, while Islami Andolan Bangladesh also did not include a single female candidate among its 268 nominees.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, despite being led by a woman for decades, gave tickets to only 10 women out of 328 candidates for 300 seats. Other parties, including Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis, Khilafat Majlis, and the Bangladesh Islami Front, also nominated only men.

S. Korea probes church bribery claims jointly

SEOUL

South Korea's prosecution and police have formed a joint investigation team to look into bribery allegations involving religious groups and politicians, the Supreme Prosecutors' Office said on Tuesday.

The joint team was created after the legally fixed investigation period of a special counsel ended last month without reaching full conclusions. The earlier probe examined alleged bribery links between the Unification Church and lawmakers from both the ruling and opposition parties.

According to the prosecutors' office, the new team will expand the scope of the investigation. It will examine not only the Unification Church but also Shincheonji Church of Jesus and other religious groups. Investigators will check whether these organisations offered bribes to politicians or tried to influence election outcomes.

Kim Tae-hoon, chief of the Seoul Southern District Prosecutors' Office, has been appointed to head the joint team. The group will include 47 prosecutors and police officers and will operate from offices at the Seoul High Prosecutors' Office and the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office.

President Lee Jae Myung had earlier called for the creation of a special or joint investigation body. He said uncovering the truth and fixing responsibility was important to prevent similar cases in the future.

The bribery claims first surfaced during a probe led by special counsel Min Joong-ki into alleged corruption linked to former first lady Kim Keon Hee. That investigation led to the indictment of opposition lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong and scrutiny of ruling party lawmaker Chun Jae-soo, among others.

The case has drawn wide public attention due to the involvement of high-profile political figures and major religious groups.

Efforts to appoint another special counsel have stalled so far. Disagreements between rival political parties have delayed further action, prompting authorities to move ahead with the joint prosecution and police investigation instead.

Officials said the team will focus on gathering evidence and clarifying facts in an impartial manner.

Cambodia reports border situation stabilising, with 444,000 evacuees returned home, while 204,844, including women and children, stay in camps

Cambodia denies any intent behind Thai border firing

BANGKOK

Cambodia has said it had no intention of firing into Thai territory, following a border incident that injured a Thai soldier, according to the Thai Army. Thai Army spokesperson Winthai Suvaree said Cambodian military units contacted their Thai counterparts and explained the firing resulted from an operational error during a routine mission.

Earlier on Tuesday, Thailand's military said a mortar round was fired near the border around 7:25 a.m., violating a ceasefire agreed last month. The explosion wounded one Thai soldier, causing shrapnel injuries to his right arm. Medical officials said his condition is stable and not life-threatening.

Thailand's 2nd Area Command said the cause of the blast remains under investigation. Units have been instructed to increase vigilance to protect soldiers and nearby communities.

Cambodian authorities also said the situation along the border is gradually stabilising. More than 444,000 people, or about 68 per cent, of evacuees displaced during recent fighting have returned home. Around 204,844 people, including women and children, remain in temporary camps.

Cambodia and Thailand agreed to an immediate ceasefire on December 27, 2025, after weeks of clashes. Cambodia has again proposed holding a special border talks meeting in Siem Reap later this month.

The talks would focus on demarcation, reducing tensions, and preventing future incidents, officials said. Both sides have stressed dialogue and restraint to maintain peace, protect civilians, and avoid renewed conflict along the sensitive frontier.

Officials said communication channels remain open, joint mechanisms are being used, and regional stability remains a shared priority amid ongoing monitoring, humanitarian support, and diplomatic engagement efforts between the two neighbouring nations going forward together peacefully.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

		5	6			7		3
	9	2		1			4	6
	6		3		4	1		
	2		8		7		5	
1		4	2			8		
	5			3			6	4
5		1		2			7	
	8			7	6		1	5
6		9	5		1		3	

7	6	1	8	4	9	2	3	5
9	3	2	1	5	7	4	6	8
4	8	5	2	6	3	1	7	9
1	9	7	6	3	4	5	8	2
6	2	8	7	1	5	9	4	3
5	4	3	9	8	2	6	1	7
3	7	4	5	2	6	8	9	1
2	1	9	4	7	8	3	5	6
8	5	6	3	9	1	7	2	4

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

SUBURB FIRE DANGER

Millions Australians face rising deadly wildfire risks

SYDNEY

Nearly seven million Australians are now living in areas most exposed to deadly wildfires, raising serious concerns about urban safety and disaster preparedness, according to a new report.

The report, released by the Climate Council and Emergency Leaders for Climate Action, warned that Australia faces a growing risk of a major urban fire disaster similar to the deadly wildfires that hit Los Angeles in January 2025.

It found that outer suburban areas around major cities share dangerous characteristics with regions affected by recent international fire disasters.

Cities including Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart, and Canberra have expanding urban fringes where homes sit close to highly flammable bushland. According to the report, the population living in outer suburbs has risen by more than 65 per cent since 2001, reaching over 6.9 million people.

Alarmingly, up to 90 per cent of homes in high-risk fire zones were built before modern bushfire safety standards were introduced. Past research shows that only 10 per cent of fires cause nearly 78 per cent of fire-related deaths, with most fatalities occurring where cities meet bushland.

Greg Mullins, founder of Emergency Leaders for Climate Action and a former fire commissioner, said almost every Australian city now has a dangerous mix of conditions. These include longer dry spells, strong winds, and a history of destructive fires, all of which increase the chance of catastrophic events.

He warned that climate pollution is making fire weather more extreme, sometimes pushing fires beyond the limits of modern firefighting efforts. The report said Australia must urgently reduce climate pollution to limit worsening fire conditions.

It also called for increased funding and capacity for emergency services and better land management along city edges. Experts warned that without stronger prevention and planning, wildfire threats to lives, homes, and infrastructure will continue to grow.

The findings highlight the urgent need for coordinated action to protect communities living on Australia's expanding urban frontlines.

China struggles to raise population after reforms

BEIJING

China is struggling to increase its population even after ending its strict one-child policy a decade ago, according to a media report.

The one-child policy, introduced in 1980, was aimed at controlling rapid population growth. It was officially scrapped in 2016 after concerns grew over ageing citizens and shrinking workforce numbers.

Despite the policy change and several incentives encouraging families to have more children, population growth has failed to recover. Between 2022 and 2024, China's population declined, highlighting the depth of the demographic challenge.

United Nations projections show that people aged above 60 now make up over 20 per cent of China's 1.4 billion population. By 2100, this figure could rise sharply, with older citizens possibly forming half of the total population.

President Xi Jinping has spoken about the need for "population security" and called the development of a high-quality population a national priority.

However, experts and citizens say current measures are not enough. Many believe deeper issues such as high youth unemployment, expensive housing, and the rising cost of raising children remain unaddressed.

A Beijing resident said encouraging people to have more children would require strong and sustained efforts, not just symbolic policies.

The long-running one-child policy also left China with a gender imbalance and many only children who now carry the full responsibility of caring for elderly parents. This pressure is greater in areas where social security systems remain weak.

QUICK READ

S.Korea's foreign reserves dip after months rise

Seoul

South Korea's foreign reserves fell for the first time in seven months in December, the central bank said Tuesday, as currency market swings pushed authorities to step in. Data from the Bank of Korea showed reserves dropped to 428.05 billion dollars, down 2.6 billion from November. Officials said efforts to calm the won reduced reserve levels. The currency had weakened sharply, prompting verbal warnings and support measures. By year-end, foreign securities holdings fell, while deposits rose and gold stayed unchanged. South Korea remained the world's ninth-largest reserve holder, with China, Japan, and others ahead, globally ranked economies.

Trent shares slide, investors worry over growth

Mumbai

Shares of Tata Group retailer Trent Limited fell sharply on Tuesday, losing over eight percent and erasing about Rs 13,000 crore in market value. The drop came despite a 17 percent rise in December quarter revenue. Investors focused on slower same-store sales and lower revenue per square foot, raising productivity concerns. Analysts said rapid store expansion may be affecting performance. Trent added new Zudio and Westside outlets during the quarter. The stock's fall extended recent losses, deepening investor worries about slowing growth momentum. The company operates fashion brands and remains part of the Tata retail portfolio nationwide.

Adani bond issue sells out very fast

New Delhi

Adani Enterprises Limited successfully raised Rs 1,000 crore through its public bond issue on Tuesday, showing strong investor confidence. The base issue of Rs 500 crore was fully subscribed within just ten minutes of opening. With the green shoe option included, total subscriptions crossed Rs 1,000 crore in less than forty five minutes. The issue offers non convertible debentures with returns of up to 8.90 percent annually. The bond sale will remain open until January 19, 2026, and allotment will be done on a first come, first served basis. Market data showed overwhelming demand from investors.

IEPFA boosts investor awareness through B'luru camp

Over 900 Bengaluru-area investors attended, accessing single-window grievance redressal, claim support, and on-the-spot investor services assistance for citizens

BENGALURU

The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority IEPFA under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs said on Tuesday it remains committed to promoting investor awareness and protection across India.

As part of this effort the Authority organised a Niveshak Shivir in Bengaluru in collaboration with the Securities and Exchange Board of India and key Market Infrastructure Institutions. The one-day camp was held under IEPFA's nationwide outreach series which focuses on cities having large volumes of unclaimed investments.

More than 900 investors and claimants from Bengaluru and nearby areas took part, receiving a single-window

platform for grievance redressal, claim support, and investor service guidance. The event aimed to bring financial services closer to citizens by offering direct help and on-the-spot assistance.

Bengaluru became the latest host city after similar camps in Pune, Hyderabad, Jaipur, and Amritsar, showing IEPFA's continued focus on a transparent, accessible, and investor-friendly financial system. During the Shivir, long-pending cases of unclaimed dividends and shares older than six years were addressed.

Investors also completed KYC and nomination updates and received help on pending IEPFA claims. Dedicated kiosks set up by companies and registrar agents allowed people to interact directly with officials, reducing delays and avoiding middlemen.

Participants praised the camp for quick solutions, clarity, and transparency, as issues that usually take months were resolved faster. IEPFA also released a simple guidebook explaining claim steps and investor services, strengthening public trust and financial awareness nationwide.

The initiative reflects growing efforts to empower ordinary investors, encourage informed decisions, and build confidence in India's regulated, fair, and inclusive capital markets for future generations across regions nationwide through active outreach.

Domestic demand to power India GDP growth

NEW DELHI

The fund house expects faster household borrowing than corporate credit, boosting demand-led sectors, with India growing 7.5% in FY26 despite weak exports and controlled inflation

India's economic growth in FY27 will be largely driven by strong domestic consumption and steady credit expansion, according to a new report. The report by SBI Mutual Fund said real GDP is expected to grow by about 7.2 per cent in FY27, while nominal GDP could rise by nearly 11 per cent.

Bank credit growth is projected at 13 to 14 per cent during the year. Credit growth has already picked up, rising from 9 per cent in May to 11.4 per cent by November 2025, with overall credit likely to grow 10.5 to 11 per cent in FY26.

The fund house said household borrowing is expected to grow faster than corporate credit, supporting demand-led sectors and premium products in the near term. India's economy is estimated to have grown around 7.5 per cent in FY26, even as exports remain the weakest link. Inflation, however, is expected to stay under control.

Equity market trends seen in 2025 are likely to continue into 2026, the report said. Emerging market equities and hard assets such as industrial commodities are expected to remain supported as global growth improves. As Indian markets see moderation in valuation premiums compared to other emerging markets, they are likely to attract steady investment flows.

Policy support should aid economic growth and help equities move gradually higher, though fresh supply may limit sharp gains. The fund prefers sectors including power, gas transmission, capital goods, cement, and renewable energy.

CPI inflation is expected near 4 per cent in FY27, with the Reserve Bank of India likely to stay on a prolonged pause. Global growth remains resilient, supported by spending worldwide.

India service sector stays strong despite slowdown

NEW DELHI

India's service sector continued to show strong growth in December, even as momentum eased slightly toward the end of the year, according to a new report.

The HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index stood at 58 in December, down from 59.8 in November. Despite the decline, the index remained well above the 50 mark that separates growth from contraction and also higher than its long-term average.

The report compiled by S and P Global said growth in new work and output slowed compared to the past eleven months as companies became cautious about hiring.

New domestic and export orders still rose at healthy levels, with demand coming from Asia, North America, the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Firms reported faster increases in input costs and prices charged to customers compared to November, though inflation levels stayed below long-term averages.

Service providers said growth was supported by competitive pricing, strong demand and positive client interest. However, companies also noted rising competition, with more alternative providers and cheaper services limiting faster expansion.

S and P Global said the softening of some indicators could point to slower growth in early 2026, even though performance remains solid. A key positive factor is low inflation, which may help firms control costs, limit price hikes and support higher sales and job creation.

While the weak rupee raised import costs, it also helped make Indian service exports more competitive. Despite signs of moderation, services exports rose faster in December.

Institutional inflows hit a record $4.2 billion in Q3, driven by stable global conditions and early trade normalisation

Institutional investments surge to record in realty

MUMBAI

Institutional investments in India's real estate sector touched a record 8.5 billion dollars in 2025, marking a strong 29 per cent rise compared to the previous year, according to a new report. The report by Colliers India said domestic institutional investors played a major role, with investments more than doubling to 4.8 billion dollars. This accounted for nearly 57 per cent of total inflows during the year.

Foreign investments stood at 3.7 billion dollars, showing a 16 per cent decline, though cross-border investments improved toward the end of the year. The final quarter showed clear signs of recovery in global investor confidence.

Quarterly inflows peaked at

an all-time high of 4.2 billion dollars in the October to December period, making it the strongest quarter ever for institutional investments in Indian real estate. The report noted that the record inflows came at a time when the global economy remained stable, with early signs of trade normalisation despite ongoing tariff discussions worldwide.

Office assets remained the most preferred segment, attracting 4.5 billion dollars, or 54 per cent of total investments. This was nearly double the amount seen in 2024, supported by higher demand for quality office spaces.

Bengaluru and Mumbai together attracted about half of the total inflows, amounting to nearly 4 billion dollars. Office properties accounted for close to three-fourths of investments in these two cities.

The year also saw the listing of the fourth office-focused REIT and major asset purchases by existing REITs, supported by strong tenant demand, higher occupancy, and rising rentals. Looking ahead, the report expects greater institutional participation and consolidation, with several office assets likely to be added to future REIT platforms.

India Russian oil imports set to fall

NEW DELHI

India's imports of Russian crude oil are expected to decline sharply in January after Reliance Industries said it is not expecting any delivery during the month.

Reliance Industries, which was India's biggest buyer of Russian oil last year, said its Jamnagar refinery has not received any Russian oil cargo in the past three weeks. The company also denied reports claiming that three Russian oil vessels were heading to its refinery.

The clarification came amid rising pressure from the United States over India's continued purchase of Russian crude. US President Donald Trump recently said Washington could raise tariffs further on India due to such imports. Following the statement, shares of Reliance Industries fell over five per cent during Tuesday's trading session, even as broader markets remained mixed.

India became the largest buyer of Russian crude after Western sanctions were imposed on Moscow over the Ukraine war. However, these purchases have drawn criticism from the US and Europe, which argue that oil revenues support Russia's war efforts.

Japan urged to anchor inflation expectations

TOKYO

A senior member of a Japanese government panel has urged the Bank of Japan to guide its policies in a way that keeps long-term inflation expectations anchored around the 2 per cent target.

Masazumi Wakatabe, a former deputy governor of the Bank of Japan and now a member of a key economic panel, said inflation is likely to slow as cost pressures ease. He noted that this could help real wages turn positive in 2026, according to minutes of a government council meeting held last month.

Wakatabe said that if current trends continue smoothly, Japan's output gap may improve and the economy could begin to show positive signs. However, he warned that Japan also faces risks linked to the current inflation phase, especially rising interest rates.

He stressed the importance of maintaining market confidence in Japan's public finances at a time when bond yields are climbing. Japanese government bond yields have been rising as investors react to expansionary fiscal signals and expectations of further rate hikes by the central bank.

Inflation in Japan has stayed above the 2 per cent target for nearly four years, driven mainly by persistent food price pressures. Markets now expect the central bank to continue tightening policy gradually.

Office leasing hits record on GCC demand

NEW DELHI

India's office leasing market reached a milestone in 2025, with total absorption touching 82.6 million square feet, according to a report.

The report by CBRE South Asia said office leasing rose around one per cent compared to the previous year, showing steady growth. Technology firms, flexible workspace operators, and banking and financial services companies together accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the total leasing activity during the year.

Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR remained the top markets, contributing about 61 per cent of the overall office space absorption across the country. Global Capability Centres emerged as a major growth driver, accounting for

around 39 per cent of leasing activity during the fourth quarter of 2025.

CBRE said global companies are expanding their presence in India through GCCs, attracted by cost efficiency, skilled talent, and digital infrastructure. These centres are expected to drive 35 to 40 per cent of total office space demand in 2026, with growth from mid-sized firms, global unicorns, and new sectors.

The technology sector is likely to continue leading demand, with companies focusing on hiring skilled professionals in artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, and cloud computing. Office demand was supported by steady investments and expansion plans of Indian and foreign companies, backed by digital transformation efforts.

Quarterly leasing during October to December rose 15 per cent to 22.2 million square feet, led by activity in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR. GCCs leased about 8.5 million square feet in the quarter, with Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Delhi-NCR emerging as preferred destinations.

US firms lead GCC expansion, while companies from Europe and Asia-Pacific are also setting up centres in India.

Cement firms see strong growth amid demand

NEW DELHI

Cement companies are expected to post healthy revenue growth in the third quarter, supported by strong demand conditions, according to a report by Axis Direct.

The report said cement demand in Q3FY26 is projected to grow by 11 per cent year-on-year, driven mainly by higher infrastructure activity and steady demand from the affordable housing segment. It noted that robust volume growth is likely to continue during the quarter, helped by government-led infrastructure spending and sustained housing demand across regions.

Rural markets are expected

to outperform urban areas in Q3FY26. This trend is being supported by above-average monsoon conditions and stable wage growth in rural areas, which have improved purchasing power.

At the same time, continued spending on roads, railways, and other public infrastructure projects is expected to provide stability to overall cement demand and support higher volumes. The report said the demand environment for cement remains positive and this momentum is expected to continue into the second half of FY26.

While cement prices may stay competitive due to increased competition and new supply entering the market, companies are likely to benefit from strong volume growth. Infrastructure activity remains a key growth driver, along with steady housing demand in both urban and semi-urban areas.

For the full financial year, cement demand is expected to grow between 7 and 8 per cent in FY26. This growth outlook is backed by the government's continued focus on capital expenditure and infrastructure development.

RATE RELIEF AHEAD

RBI may cut rates further in 2026

NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India still has space to reduce interest rates further in 2026 after delivering large rate cuts during 2025, according to a report by IIFL Capital.

The report said the RBI could cut policy rates by another 50 basis points in 2026, following cumulative cuts of 125 basis points announced last year. It noted that the gap between the repo rate and core inflation remains much higher than historical levels, creating room for more easing.

At present, the difference

between the repo rate and core consumer price inflation stands at about 2.8 percentage points, compared to a seven-year average of 1.1 percentage points. This suggests that interest rates remain relatively high despite low inflation.

The report added that continued monetary easing, along with ongoing deregulation, could help accelerate economic growth. Improved credit conditions are also expected to support banks, which may outperform as lending activity strengthens.

In December, the RBI reduced the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent. Over the full year 2025, total rate cuts reached 125 basis points. India's economic growth is expected to pick up in 2026, supported by reforms and the cumulative impact of past rate reductions. While global monetary support may remain limited, domestic factors are likely to play a bigger role.

The report highlighted that free trade agreements, especially with the European Union, and export-focused foreign investments could boost growth. A competitive rupee is also expected to help. Capital spending is likely to revive in the second half of FY27, adding momentum. Inflation risks remain low, with crude oil prices expected to stay around 65 dollars per barrel Equity markets may also benefit, with earnings upgrades and steady returns expected.

Most Powerful War Machines in the World

Modern warfare has evolved into a sophisticated dance of technology, engineering, and strategic innovation. Today's most powerful war machines represent the pinnacle of human ingenuity applied to military capability, combining cutting-edge electronics, advanced materials, and devastating firepower. These instruments of modern combat span across land, sea, air, and even space, each designed to project power and maintain strategic advantages in an increasingly complex global security environment.

The Evolution of Military Technology

The concept of war machines has transformed dramatically over the past century. Where once cavalry charges and artillery barrages decided battles, today's conflicts are shaped by stealth technology, precision-guided munitions, and networked warfare systems. The most powerful war machines of our era are not merely weapons but integrated platforms that gather intelligence, communicate across vast distances, and deliver force with unprecedented accuracy. This evolution reflects changing military doctrines that emphasize speed, precision, and information dominance over sheer destructive capacity. Modern war machines must operate in contested environments where adversaries possess sophisticated detection and countermeasure capabilities, requiring constant innovation to maintain tactical and strategic advantages.

Stealth Aircraft: Masters of Invisible Warfare

The development of stealth technology has revolutionized air combat, and the F-22 Raptor stands as perhaps the most formidable air superiority fighter ever built. Entering service in 2005, this fifth-generation fighter combines stealth, speed, agility, and advanced avionics in a package that remains unmatched in air-to-air combat. The F-22's stealth characteristics derive from its carefully shaped airframe, radar-absorbent materials, and internal weapons carriage. Its radar cross-section is reportedly comparable to a marble, making it nearly invisible to enemy air defense systems until it's too late. The aircraft can supercruise at supersonic speeds without using fuel-guzzling afterburners, maintaining both stealth and efficiency during extended missions. Equally impressive is the F-35 Lightning II, a multi-role stealth fighter designed for versatility rather than pure air superiority. The F-35 exists in three variants for the Air Force, Navy, and Marines, with the F-35B featuring short takeoff and vertical landing capabilities. What distinguishes the F-35 is its sensor fusion capability, combining data from multiple sources to provide pilots with unprecedented situational awareness. The aircraft essentially functions as a flying intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform that can also engage targets with precision weapons. Stealth bombers represent another category of invisible warfare. The B-2 Spirit, with its distinctive flying wing design, can penetrate sophisticated air defense networks to deliver both conventional and nuclear weapons. Its successor, the B-21 Raider, promises even greater capabilities with improved stealth characteristics and more advanced systems, though details remain classified.

Main Battle Tanks: Armored Fist of Ground Forces

Despite predictions of their obsolescence, main battle tanks remain crucial components of modern armies, combining firepower, protection, and mobility in a single platform. The latest generation of tanks incorporates composite armor, active protection systems, and advanced fire control that would seem like science fiction to tankers from previous eras. The American M1A2 Abrams, particularly in its SEPv3 (System Enhancement Package version 3) configuration, exemplifies modern tank design. Its gas turbine engine provides impressive acceleration and speed, while its composite armor, supplemented by reactive armor tiles, offers protection against a wide range of threats. The 120mm smoothbore cannon can engage targets at distances exceeding two miles, guided by thermal imaging, laser rangefinding, and ballistic computers that account for variables like wind, temperature, and target motion. Russia's T-14 Armata represents a radical departure from traditional tank design, featuring an unmanned turret with the crew protected in an armored capsule in the hull. Its active protection system can reportedly intercept incoming projectiles, while its 125mm cannon or optional 152mm gun provides formidable firepower. However, production has been limited, and combat performance remains largely untested. Germany's Leopard 2A7+ combines proven reliability with modern upgrades, including enhanced urban warfare capabilities and improved armor packages. South Korea's K2 Black Panther features an autoloader and hydropneumatic suspension that allows the tank to "kneel" or "lean" to improve firing angles, while Israel's Merkava IV prioritizes crew protection with its engine-forward design and trophy active protection system.

Strategic Bombers: Long-Range Devastation

Strategic bombers represent the ultimate expression of long-range power projection. The United States operates a triad of bombers that span from Cold War veterans to cutting-edge designs, each serving distinct roles in the nuclear and conventional deterrence mission. The B-52 Stratofortress, despite entering service in 1955, remains relevant through continuous upgrades. Its cavernous weapons bay and external hardpoints can carry everything from cruise missiles to precision-guided bombs, while its long range and endurance make it ideal for extended missions. Plans call for keeping the B-52 in service until 2050, making it a century-spanning design. The supersonic B-1B Lancer serves as a conventional heavy bomber, capable of carrying the largest payload of guided and unguided weapons in the Air Force inventory.

Integrated Air Defense Systems

Modern air defense systems have evolved into sophisticated networks capable of tracking and engaging multiple targets simultaneously. Russia's S-400 and upcoming S-500 systems can reportedly engage aircraft, cruise missiles, and even ballistic missiles at ranges exceeding 250 miles. These systems integrate multiple radar types, command and control networks, and various missile interceptors to create overlapping fields of fire. American systems like the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense provide layered defense against different threat types.

Aircraft Carriers: Floating Cities of Power

Among the most formidable war machines ever created are nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, with the United States Navy's Gerald R. Ford-class carriers representing the current apex of this technology. These massive vessels, displacing over 100,000 tons, serve as mobile airbases capable of projecting power across thousands of miles of ocean. The USS Gerald R. Ford, commissioned in 2017, incorporates revolutionary technologies including electromagnetic aircraft launch systems that replace traditional steam catapults, advanced arresting gear, and a redesigned island superstructure. The ship can carry approximately 75 aircraft and houses a crew of over 4,500 sailors. Its two nuclear reactors provide virtually unlimited range and can generate enough electricity to power a small city. What makes carriers truly powerful is not just their individual capabilities but their role as the centerpiece of carrier strike groups. Accompanied by guided-missile cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and supply ships, a carrier strike group represents a complete naval task force capable of conducting sustained combat operations far from home ports. The ability to launch and recover fixed-wing aircraft at sea gives these vessels unmatched flexibility in power projection, humanitarian assistance, and deterrence. Other nations have developed their own carrier capabilities, though none match the scale of American super-carriers. China's Type 003 Fujian, launched in 2022, represents Beijing's growing naval ambitions, while Russia, France, India, and the United Kingdom maintain their own carrier fleets. Each design reflects different strategic priorities and technological capabilities, but all share the fundamental advantage of mobile aviation at sea.

The Human Element

Despite the technological sophistication of modern war machines, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the training, judgment, and courage of the humans who operate them. The most advanced fighter aircraft is only as capable as its pilot, and the most powerful naval vessel is only as effective as its crew. Modern militaries invest heavily in training programs that allow personnel to extract maximum capability from their equipment while adapting to rapidly changing battlefield conditions. Moreover, the integration of these various systems into coherent operational concepts requires sophisticated command and control, robust logistics, and clear strategic thinking. The most powerful military forces are those that can effectively combine different types of war machines into coordinated operations that leverage their respective strengths while compensating for weaknesses. The most powerful war machines in the world today represent centuries of accumulated military experience combined with cutting-edge technology.

Hypersonic Weapons: The Next Frontier

The development of hypersonic weapons represents a new chapter in military technology. These systems, capable of traveling at speeds exceeding Mach 5, challenge traditional defense systems with their combination of speed and maneuverability. Russia's Kinzhal and Avangard systems, China's DF-17, and ongoing American programs like the AGM-183 ARRW suggest that hypersonic weapons will play an increasingly important role in future conflicts. What makes hypersonic weapons particularly challenging is their flight profile. Unlike ballistic missiles that follow predictable parabolic trajectories, hypersonic glide vehicles can maneuver during flight, making interception extremely difficult with current technology. The compressed timeframe for detection and response fundamentally changes defensive calculations.

Submarines: Silent Hunters of the Deep

Nuclear-powered submarines, particularly ballistic missile submarines, represent perhaps the most survivable component of nuclear deterrence. These vessels can remain submerged for months, silently patrolling vast ocean areas while carrying enough firepower to devastate entire nations. The Ohio-class submarines of the U.S. Navy each carry 20 Trident II ballistic missiles, with each missile capable of carrying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles. The certainty that several of these submarines are always at sea, undetectable and ready to launch, forms a cornerstone of strategic stability. Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France maintain their own ballistic missile submarine fleets, ensuring second-strike capability. Attack submarines like the Virginia-class serve different but equally vital roles. These vessels hunt enemy submarines, gather intelligence, conduct special operations support, and can strike land targets with cruise missiles.

Salah Stars Again for Egypt as Nigeria Routs Mozambique

Late Salah strike saves Egypt as Nigeria cruise with dominant last-16 victory

RABAT

Mohamed Salah once again proved decisive for Egypt, scoring with the final kick of extra time to secure a 3-1 victory over Benin in the Africa Cup of Nations last 16, while Nigeria stormed into the quarterfinals with a comprehensive 4-0 rout of Mozambique.

Egypt were forced to dig deep after being surprisingly held to a 1-1 draw in regulation time by a resilient Benin side. The seven-time African champions had taken the lead earlier but were stunned in the 83rd minute when Benin winger Jodel Dossou reacted quickest to a rebound to equalise and send the contest into extra time.

With penalties looming, Egypt finally found the breakthrough. Salah, who had been closely marked throughout the match, stepped up when it mattered most, firing home in the dying seconds of extra time to seal the win. His late strike capped another influential performance from the Liverpool forward, reaffirming his status as Egypt's talisman on the continental stage.

The victory sends Egypt into the quarterfinals, keeping alive their hopes of reclaiming the Africa Cup of Nations title after falling short in recent editions.

Earlier in the day, Nigeria produced one of the most dominant displays of the tournament, sweeping aside Mozambique 4-0 to book their place in the last eight with ease. The Super Eagles controlled the game from the outset, combining pace, power and precision to overwhelm their opponents.

Nigeria opened the scoring in the first half and never looked back, adding three more goals as Mozambique struggled to cope with their intensity and attacking depth. The emphatic win underlined Nigeria's credentials as one of the tournament favourites and sent a strong message to the remaining contenders.

With both Egypt and Nigeria advancing, the quarterfinal lineup continues to take shape, setting the stage for high-profile clashes as Africa's premier international tournament heads into its decisive phase.

West Ham Signs Lazio Striker Valentine Castellanos in Big Transfer Move

LONDON

West Ham United have completed the signing of Lazio striker Valentine "Taty" Castellanos in a significant transfer move that appears to signal renewed backing for head coach Nuno Espírito Santo amid growing pressure on his position.

The Premier League club confirmed the deal, announcing that Castellanos had been "identified as a key target by head coach Nuno Espírito Santo," a clear show of confidence in the Portuguese manager, who has faced speculation over his future following recent poor results. Castellanos has joined the Hammers on a four-and-a-half-year contract, with an option for a further year. West Ham did not disclose the transfer fee for the 27-year-old Argentine forward. In his first interview with the club, Castellanos highlighted the role Nuno played in bringing him to east London. "The guys have welcomed me really well, the coach and all," he said, underlining the manager's influence in his decision to join.

Nuno has been in charge at West Ham only since September, but his tenure has already come under scrutiny. Saturday's 3-0 defeat to previously winless Wolverhampton Wanderers left the Hammers languishing in 18th place in the Premier League standings. West Ham are back in action on Tuesday against Nottingham Forest, a match seen as crucial in easing pressure on the coaching staff.

Castellanos arrives with experience across multiple leagues. He joined Lazio in 2023 and departs the Italian club having scored 22 goals in 98 appearances. This season, his progress was slowed by a hamstring injury, though he still managed two goals in 12 matches.

The striker has also represented Argentina twice at international level and previously enjoyed success in Major League Soccer, winning the MLS Cup with New York City FC. Known for his work rate, movement, and finishing, Castellanos is expected to add much-needed firepower to a West Ham side struggling for goals.

With the January window open and results urgently needed, the signing could prove pivotal both for West Ham's survival push and for stabilising Nuno Espírito Santo's reign.

Novak Djokovic Pulls Out of Australian Open Lead-Up in Adelaide

SYDNEY

Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the Adelaide International, citing fitness concerns as he fine-tunes his preparations for the Australian Open later this month.

The Serbian great, who turns 39 in May, was due to compete at the ATP event starting January 12, using it as a lead-up to the season's first Grand Slam at Melbourne Park. Djokovic is chasing a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and an elusive 25th Grand Slam crown.

"To all my fans in Adelaide, unfortunately I'm not quite physically ready to compete in the Adelaide International next week," Djokovic wrote on Instagram. "It's personally very disappointing to me, as I have such great memories of winning the title there two years ago. I was really excited about returning as it truly felt like playing at home."

Djokovic added that his focus has now shifted entirely to Melbourne. "My focus is now on my preparation for the Australian Open and I look forward to arriving in Melbourne soon and seeing all the tennis fans in Australia," he said.

Liam Rosenior has verbally agreed to become Chelsea manager, describing the Stamford Bridge role as an opportunity he could not refuse

Liam Rosenior Says He Has 'Agreed Verbally' to Become Chelsea Manager

STRASBOURG

Liam Rosenior on Tuesday confirmed that he has "verbally agreed" to take over as Chelsea manager, describing the role at the Premier League giants as "an opportunity I cannot turn down."

Speaking at a press conference held at his current club Strasbourg, Rosenior all but confirmed his imminent move to Stamford Bridge. "It looks like I am going to be the next manager of that football club (Chelsea)," the 41-year-old Englishman said, adding that formalities were expected to be completed shortly.

Rosenior had been widely touted as the frontrunner to replace Enzo Maresca, who was sacked by Chelsea on Thursday, with his candidacy strengthened by the fact that both Chelsea and Strasbourg are owned by the same consortium, BlueCo. While Chelsea are yet to officially announce the appointment, talks were held with Rosenior in London on Monday.

"Everything is agreed and it will probably go through in the next few hours," Rosenior said. He explained that he wanted to address the situation publicly in Strasbourg out of respect for the club and its supporters. "I'm here because I care about this club and I felt it was right to answer your questions physically here today before I move on."

Rosenior, who has no prior experience as a Premier League head coach, will become Chelsea's fourth permanent manager since BlueCo took control of the club in 2022. His appointment marks another bold move by the London side as they continue to reshape their managerial structure.

The former Hull City boss began his coaching career at Derby County in 2019, working under Phillip Cocu before becoming assistant to Wayne Rooney. He briefly served as interim manager in 2022 before taking charge of Hull City later that year. After an 18-month spell, he was dismissed and subsequently appointed Strasbourg manager in July 2024.

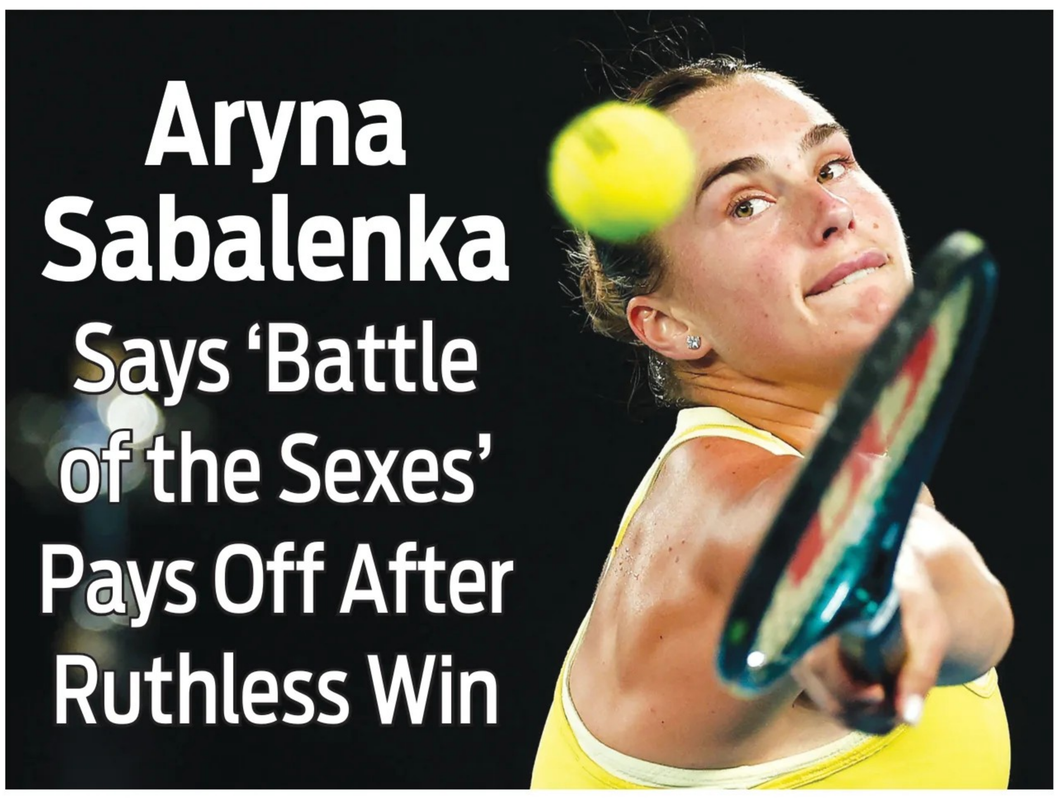
At Strasbourg, Rosenior impressed by guiding the Ligue 1 side to a seventh-place finish last season, earning plaudits for his work with a young squad. He now faces the biggest challenge of his career, stepping into the intense spotlight that comes with managing one of England's most scrutinised clubs.

Ski Mountaineering, to Debut at Milan Cortina Games

MILAN

The Milan Cortina Winter Olympics will introduce a brand new sport next month, with ski mountaineering making its Olympic debut and adding a fast-paced, endurance-driven spectacle to the Winter Games programme.

Known as "skimo," the sport blends uphill sprinting on skis and in boots with rapid downhill skiing. While its Olympic appearance is new, ski mountaineering has deep roots dating back to the late 19th century, when alpine explorers and soldiers relied on similar techniques to travel through snowbound terrain. In recent years, backcountry winter sports have surged in popularity, with participation believed to have increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ski mountaineering races are short and intense, with sprint events lasting about three minutes. At the Milan Cortina Games, athletes will compete in men's and women's sprint events, along with a mixed relay.



Aryna Sabalenka Says 'Battle of the Sexes' Pays Off After Ruthless Win

BRISBANE

World number one Aryna Sabalenka said her much-discussed exhibition match against Nick Kyrgios had paid rich dividends after she stormed into the third round of the Brisbane International with a ruthless display on Tuesday. The Belarusian needed just 48 minutes to dismantle Spain's Cristina Bucsa 6-0, 6-1 in the second round of the season-opening tournament, sending an early warning to her rivals ahead of the Australian Open, which begins on January 18.

Sabalenka, 27, was in complete control from the outset, racing through the first set in just 22 minutes before wrapping up the match with similar ease in the second. Bucsa, ranked 50th in the world, had no answer to the top seed's raw power and relentless aggression. The emphatic performance came after Sabalenka faced criticism for taking part in a December 28 exhibition match in Dubai against Australian showman Nick Kyrgios in a much-hyped "battle of the sexes" contest. Sabalenka, however, said the unusual matchup proved invaluable.

"When you play against a guy, the intensity is completely different," Sabalenka said. "Especially when there is Nick, who is drop-shotting every other shot, so you move a lot. It was great fitness for me."

"And today I was like, whew, let's move around," she added. "That exhibition was fun. It was a great challenge."

Sabalenka also felt the event helped draw attention to the sport. "I think we brought so many eyes on tennis. It wasn't about proving something to anyone, it was about showing that tennis can be really huge."

Sabalenka will next face either Jelena Ostapenko or Sorana Cirstea and remains on course for a potential quarter-final clash with Madison Keys, a rematch of last year's Australian Open final, which the American won.

Keys also progressed in Brisbane, defeating compatriot McCartney Kessler 6-4, 6-3, though she admitted it took time to find her rhythm after receiving a first-round bye.

Elsewhere, the men's draw saw two notable upsets. American Brandon Nakashima knocked out second seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, while Belgian qualifier Raphael Collignon stunned Canada's fifth seed Denis Shapovalov 6-4, 6-2.

Bayern's 17-Year-Old Prodigy Lennart Karl Calls Real Madrid His 'Dream Club'

Teenage midfielder sparks debate after candid admission at Bayern fan gathering

MUNICH

Bayern Munich's latest teenage sensation Lennart Karl has found himself at the centre of attention after openly admitting that Real Madrid is his "dream club," a comment that drew laughter at a fan event but sparked criticism online among Bayern supporters.

The 17-year-old midfielder, who became Bayern's youngest-ever Champions League goalscorer in October, made the remark during a traditional New Year fan gathering on Sunday. Asked during a question-and-answer session whether he had a "dream club" other than Bayern, Karl responded with striking honesty.

"Bayern's a very, very big club in any case, and it's a dream to play there, but some day I'd definitely like to go to Real Madrid. That's my dream club, but that stays between us," Karl said, drawing laughter from fans in attendance. The comments were broadcast by Sky Sport in Germany. He was quick to add, "But obviously Bayern is something very, very special and it's lots and lots of fun at the club."

While those present appeared to take the teenager's words in good spirit, the reaction online was less forgiving. Some Bayern fans questioned Karl's loyalty to the club, expressing concern that such statements could be a distraction for a player still in the early stages of his career.

Karl is a product of Bayern's renowned youth academy and has risen rapidly through the ranks. He made his senior debut in a 10-0 rout of Auckland City at the Club World Cup in June and has since established himself as a regular this season. The midfielder has scored six goals in 22 appearances across competitions, underlining his growing importance to the team.

Despite the criticism, Karl's comments reflect the admiration many young players hold for Real Madrid, one of football's most decorated clubs. For now, Bayern remain central to his development, but the episode highlights the scrutiny that comes with early success at one of Europe's biggest clubs.

As Karl continues to mature on the pitch, Bayern will hope his focus remains on his football, even as his long-term dreams make headlines.

ICC WOMEN'S T20 RANKINGS: HARMANPREET KAUR MOVES UP TWO PLACES

DUBAI

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur climbed two places to 13th in the latest ICC Women's T20I batting rankings after her match-winning 68 off 43 balls against Sri Lanka in the fifth T20I at Thiruvananthapuram. India won the match by 15 runs to complete a 5-0 series sweep. Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma retained their third and sixth positions respectively, while Australia's Beth Mooney stayed on top. Jemimah Rodrigues slipped to 12th. In bowling, Deepti Sharma lost the No.1 spot to Australia's Annabel Sutherland.

Mustafizur Unlikely to Get Compensation after Release

B'desh pacer faces contract termination fallout after BCCI directive

KOLKATA

Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman is unlikely to receive any financial compensation following his release from the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), a decision taken on the instructions of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), despite the player having no role in the circumstances that led to the termination of his Indian Premier League (IPL) contract.

Mustafizur was bought by KKR for a hefty Rs 9.20 crore at the IPL auction after intense bidding from Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals. However, the Indian board, while directing his release, did not spell out specific reasons, stating only that the move was necessitated by "the developments all around".

The decision has sparked debate over player rights, particularly since Mustafizur neither withdrew voluntarily from the tournament nor was accused of any disciplinary or professional misconduct. In response, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has reportedly demanded that Bangladesh's T20 World Cup matches be shifted from India to Sri Lanka, escalating the issue beyond the cricketing sphere.

According to sources, the existing insurance framework for IPL players offers little relief in such cases. "The salaries of all IPL players are insured. For overseas players, franchises usually receive insurance payouts if the player is injured after joining the camp or during the tournament," an IPL official told on condition of anonymity. "Typically, up to 50 percent may be covered by insurance."

However, Mustafizur's situation does not fall under standard insurance clauses. Since his release was not injury-related or linked to cricketing participation, KKR are not contractually obligated to pay him any compensation.

"In case of an insurance claim, this situation isn't covered, so KKR are under no official obligation to pay a penny," the source said, adding that while legal options exist, overseas players are generally reluctant to pursue them due to jurisdictional and geopolitical complexities.

As things stand, despite being a high-value acquisition with a clean professional record, Mustafizur Rahman appears set to walk away empty-handed, highlighting the limitations of player protection when administrative and political factors override sporting considerations.

Steve Smith Becomes Second-Highest Run-Scorer in Ashes, Behind Only Bradman

SYDNEY

Australian batting star Steve Smith etched his name deeper into Ashes folklore on Tuesday, becoming the second-highest run-scorer in the storied history of the marquee Test rivalry, trailing only legendary Sir Donald Bradman.

Smith achieved the milestone during Day 2 of the fifth and final Ashes Test against England at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Batting in Australia's first innings, the right-hander went past England great Jack Hobbs, who had accumulated 3,636 runs in 41 matches and 71 innings at an average of 54.26.

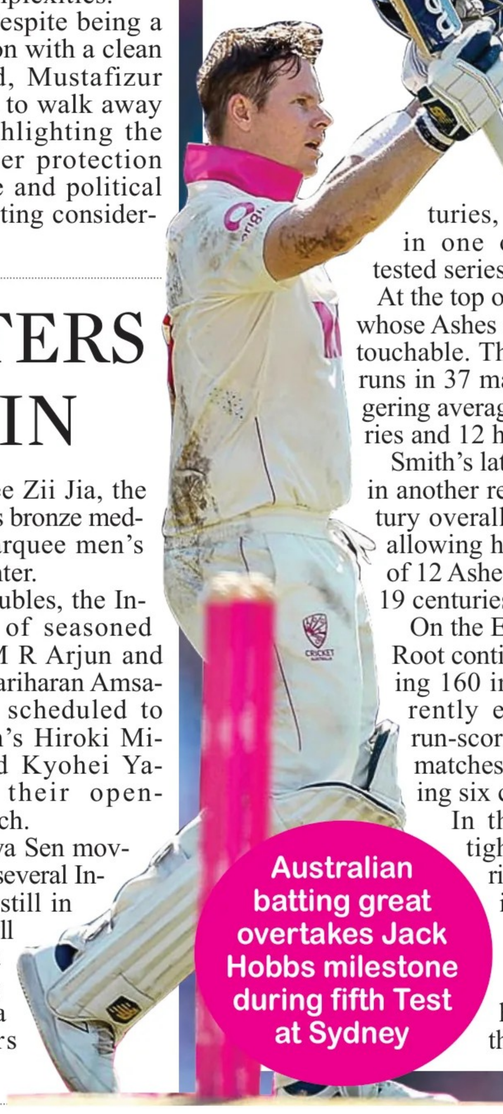
With his latest effort, Smith now has 3,644 runs from 41 Ashes matches and 73 innings at a remarkable average of 56.93. His tally includes 13 centuries and 15 half-centuries, underlining his dominance in one of cricket's most fiercely contested series.

At the top of the list remains Don Bradman, whose Ashes record is widely regarded as untouchable. The Australian icon scored 5,028 runs in 37 matches and 63 innings at a staggering average of 89.78, laced with 19 centuries and 12 half-centuries.

Smith's latest hundred was also significant in another respect. It was his 37th Test century overall and his 13th in Ashes cricket, allowing him to surpass Jack Hobbs' tally of 12 Ashes hundreds. Only Bradman, with 19 centuries, stands ahead of him.

On the England side, former captain Joe Root continued his fine Ashes run by scoring 160 in the first innings. Root is currently eighth on the all-time Ashes run-scorers list with 2,822 runs from 39 matches at an average of 41.50, including six centuries and 18 half-centuries.

In the match situation, Australia tightened their grip on the contest, riding on Travis Head's commanding 163 and Smith's century to surge past England's first-innings total of 384. With momentum firmly on their side, the hosts looked well placed to close the series on a dominant note.



Australian batting great overtakes Jack Hobbs milestone during fifth Test at Sydney

Cricketer Tests Positive as Dhanalakshmi Slapped With Ban

CHENNAI

In a rare development in Indian domestic cricket, Uttarakhand cricketer Rajan Kumar has tested positive for prohibited substances, according to the National Anti-Doping Agency's (NADA) latest update, even as former India sprinter S Dhanalakshmi was handed an eight-year ban under a case resolution agreement.

As per NADA's provisionally suspended athletes' list, Rajan tested positive for multiple banned substances — Drostanolone, Metenolone and Clomifene, the latter a selective estrogen receptor modulator often used in infertility treatment. Rajan last featured for Uttarakhand against Delhi in a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Group D match on December 8 last year. It remains unclear whether the test was conducted before that fixture and whether the result could impact the legitimacy of the match.

In another case, Indian women's footballer Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi has tested positive for the anabolic steroid Metandienone and is likely to face a four-year ban.

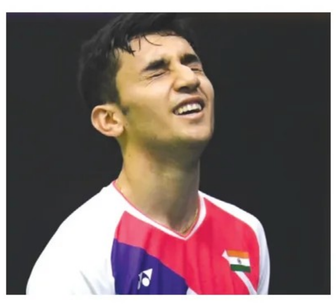
Meanwhile, former Olympian S Dhanalakshmi received an eight-year suspension after opting for a case resolution agreement with NADA. The Tamil Nadu sprinter had earlier served a three-year ban under the same provision after testing positive for Metandienone. After making a comeback last year, she again tested positive — this time for Drostanolone — during the India Open Athletics meet in Sangrur in July.

MALAYSIA OPEN: LAKSHYA SEN ENTERS SECOND ROUND WITH GRITTY WIN

KUALA LUMPUR

India's top men's singles shuttler Lakshya Sen opened his 2026 season on a positive note, advancing to the second round of the Malaysia Open Super 750 badminton tournament with a hard-fought victory here on Tuesday.

The 24-year-old from Almora, who enjoyed a strong run last season by winning the Australian Open and finishing runner-up at the Hong Kong Open, was made to dig deep by Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh. In a gripping opening-round clash that lasted 70 minutes, Lakshya prevailed 21-16, 15-21, 21-14 against the world No. 21.



Currently ranked 13th in the world, Lakshya showed composure in the decider, controlling the rallies and using his court coverage effectively to pull away after the mid-game interval. The 2021 World Championships bronze medallist will next face either sixth seed Christo Popov of France or Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu.

In women's singles, however, it was an early exit for Malvika Bansod, who was making her return to competitive badminton after a six-month break due to a left knee injury. The Indian shuttler struggled to find rhythm against experienced Thai campaigner Ratchanok Intanon, losing 11-21, 11-21 in straight games. Intanon, a former world champion and the tournament's seventh seed, dominated proceedings with her sharp net play and controlled aggression.

Action continued for India later in the day as Ayush Shetty, the US Open Super 300 champion, was slated to face Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, the Paris Olympics bronze medallist, in a marquee men's singles encounter.

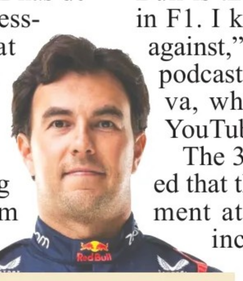
In men's doubles, the Indian pairing of seasoned campaigner M R Arjun and 22-year-old Hariharan Amsakarunan was scheduled to take on Japan's Hiroki Midorikawa and Kyohei Yamashita in their opening-round match.

With Lakshya Sen moving ahead and several Indian shuttlers still in action, India will be hoping for a strong showing as the Malaysia Open gathers momentum.

Perez Says Being Verstappen's Teammate at Red Bull was 'the Worst Job in F1'

MEXICO CITY

Sergio "Checo" Pérez has delivered a candid assessment of his time at Red Bull, describing life alongside Max Verstappen as "the worst job there is in Formula 1," following his exit from the team at the end of the 2024 season.



Mexican driver reflects on tense Red Bull years after exit, ahead of Cadillac return

Pérez spent four years as Verstappen's teammate at Red Bull but was dropped despite having two years left on his contract. The Mexican driver is set to return to Formula 1 in 2026 with new entrant Cadillac after sitting out last season.

"I was on the best team but it was complicated because being Max's teammate at Red Bull is the worst job there is in F1. I knew what I was up against," Pérez said during a podcast with Oswaldo Trava, which was posted on YouTube on Sunday.

The 35-year-old suggested that the internal environment at Red Bull became increasingly strained, regardless of performance. "At Red Bull everything was a problem; if I was faster than Max it was a problem, a very tense atmosphere was created," Pérez said. "If you were too slow and Max was slow, then everything was a problem."

Pérez enjoyed his most successful Formula 1 seasons during his Red Bull stint. He finished fourth in the championship in 2021, third in 2022, and was runner-up to Verstappen in 2023, marking the best season of his career. However, his form dipped in 2024, when Verstappen won yet another world title while Pérez finished eighth, leading to his release.

"We had the best team, unfortunately everything was destroyed," Pérez said. "We had the team to have dominated the sport for the next 10 years, I think, and unfortunately it all ended."

A Formula 1 regular since his debut in 2011, Pérez will now begin a new chapter with Cadillac, where he is expected to partner former Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas.

Total prize pool jumps 16 percent as Melbourne Slam boosts payouts across all rounds

Aus Open Winners to Get $2.79mn as Prize Money Hits New High

MELBOURNE

Players competing at this month's Australian Open will battle for a record prize pool after organisers announced a significant increase in total prize money for the season-opening Grand Slam.

Tennis Australia on Tuesday confirmed a 16 percent rise in the overall purse, taking it to a historic Aus$111.5 million (US$75 million). The men's and women's singles champions will each earn Aus$4.15 million (US$2.79 million), marking a 19 percent increase from last year's Aus$3.5 million.

The enhanced payouts extend well beyond the champions. Players exiting in the first round of the main draw will receive Aus$150,000 (US$100,750), while those eliminated in the opening round of qualifying will still take home Aus$40,500 (US$27,200), underlining the tournament's focus on financial security for lower-ranked players.

Tournament director Craig Tiley said the prize money hike reflected Tennis Australia's broader commitment to supporting professional tennis careers at every level.

"From boosting qualifying prize money by 55 percent since 2023 to enhancing player benefits, we're ensuring professional tennis is sustainable for all competitors," Tiley said. "By supporting players at all levels, we're building deeper talent pools and more compelling storylines for fans."

The Australian Open has steadily increased payouts in recent years as players and governing bodies continue discussions around revenue sharing and rising costs on tour. The latest rise is expected to be welcomed by players, particularly those outside the elite ranks who rely heavily on prize money to fund travel, coaching and training expenses.

The first Grand Slam of the year will get under way at Melbourne Park on January 18. Italy's Jannik Sinner and American Madison Keys will return as defending champions, with both aiming to retain their titles amid strong competition from established stars and emerging challengers.

With record prize money on offer and a strong field set to compete, the 2026 Australian Open promises high stakes both on and off the court.

Venus Impresses despite Loss in Auckland

WELLINGTON

Venus Williams may have begun her 2026 singles season with a loss, but the 45-year-old American delivered an encouraging performance at the WTA Tour tournament in Auckland, underlining her enduring competitiveness on the professional circuit.

Williams was edged out 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 by fifth-seeded Magda Linette of Poland in a hard-fought opening-round match on Tuesday. Ranked No. 52, Linette was only two years old when Williams played her first professional singles match, a striking illustration of the generational gap bridged by the seven-time Grand Slam champion.

The contest marked Williams' 1,101st singles match on the WTA Tour, and her level against an opponent 12 years her junior offered optimism as she prepares for the Hobart International and the Australian Open later this month. Williams has received wild-card entries for both events, including the season's first Grand Slam at Melbourne Park.

The Auckland appearance was Williams' first singles outing since her US Open first-round loss to Karolina Muchova last August. She played only three tournaments in 2025 but made headlines by defeating Peyton Stearns in July to become the second-oldest woman, after Martina Navratilova, to win a WTA Tour match.

Against Linette, Williams looked sharp and mobile, serving seven aces and striking the ball cleanly from both wings. "She moved really great and was hitting the ball extremely well," Linette said courtside, admitting she had to stay calm to withstand Williams' pressure.

Currently ranked No. 582, Williams has fond memories of Auckland, where she defeated Caroline Wozniacki in the 2015 final to claim the 41st of her 46 career WTA titles. This year, she said she felt little pressure returning to competition.

Williams started strongly, trading breaks and taking the second set with aggressive baseline play and effective net approaches, before Linette seized control in the deciding set. Despite the loss, Williams' performance suggested she remains a compelling presence on tour.

Impasse Over, ISL to Begin on February 14 with All Clubs on Board

NEW DELHI

The prolonged deadlock over India's top-tier football league ended on Tuesday, with the Indian Super League (ISL) set to kick off on February 14 with participation from all 14 clubs.

The announcement was made after a high-level meeting involving the government, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and club representatives.

Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya confirmed that the 2025–26 ISL season will be held in a single-leg home-and-away format, featuring 91 matches, though logistical details are still being finalised. "All clubs, including Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, will participate," he said.

AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey stated that a ₹25-crore central pool has been created to conduct the ISL, with AIFF contributing ₹14 crore in the absence of a commercial partner. The I-League will also resume around the same time as a truncated tournament with 11 teams and 55 matches.

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